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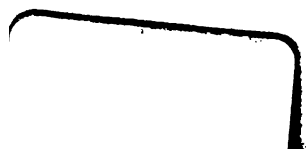
The background of the book cover is a detailed illustration in a dark, monochromatic style. It depicts a multi-story red brick building with numerous windows, some of which have flower boxes. A large, leafy tree stands to the right of the building. In the foreground, there is a street scene with a horse-drawn carriage and a person walking. The overall tone is somber and historical.

A LOCAL HABITATION

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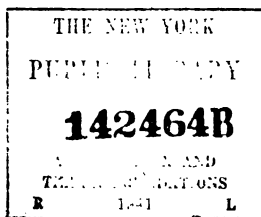


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I

"IT'S two and a quarter in advance, the room is," Mrs. Miles suggested.

She had not failed to emphasize the significant words, yet she took the money with an air of unconcern. "I'm glad to have a man in it," she added, as though that were the important thing. "The last was a girl. She cooked 'n' washed with my gas, 'n' wouldn't pay for it. So I had to send her away."

"Ah?" said Maurice Carter, absently. At the moment he was wondering where in this third-floor front he would put the generous writing-table that he, a homeless man, had been so weak as to buy. A folding bed, bureau, and washstand were already to be reckoned with; and he foresaw that when winter came it would be necessary to add a stove. The case was desperate, but the table represented an irresistible force; immovable bodies must be made to move. Presently the young man decided that the space between the windows would accommodate his household god, provided his trunk would go into the closet. He drew a long breath of relief.

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Then he became aware that his new landlady was prosing evenly on :

"It's as pleasant a room as there is in the house, / think. Two windows, and on the street ; you c'n see everything that's passin'. I don't have any luck with it, though. The woman that was here before Miss Newton — her I turned out — *she* was arrested for shop-liftin'. You could 'a' knocked me down with a feather when I heard of it. Anybody'd said she was a perfect lady."

Carter pushed forward a chair, but the landlady waved it away. While she talked she scanned the room with the eyes of one to whom all things hint of possible patches or imperative repairs ; and when a loose knob on the bureau attracted her, she opened the drawer and tightened the nut, quite as a matter of course. A listener under such conditions felt a curious insignificance. Words were for him, but the speaker's thoughts, he surmised, were on the wall-paper or the carpet.

"I felt bad about the shop-liftin', because I try to keep the house respectable," the woman pursued. "Miles was mad, too. But he's away all day, — he's a carpenter, you know, — and I tell him he don't know anything about it. You just got to take your chances. Get your money in advance, and if they don't keep paid up and

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behave themselves, why, put 'em out. Then I like to see people have a good time, I always did myself before I took a lodgin'-house, and as long's they act half-decent I mind my own business. Miles says I'm too easy."

"He doesn't understand," Carter ventured.

"No, he don't. When you come to keep this big house full, winter and summer, and pay sixty-two dollars a month rent, you ain't" —

The landlady had started to loop the curtains with faded fragments of blue ribbon. Something moved her to glance into the street. Then she was silent.

"You were about to say"— prompted her auditor.

"It's Mis' Palmer's trunk," the landlady explained. "She's a Vermont lady. Nettie Palmer and her chum, Miss Dow, work in Merchant's, and have the square room under this, and Mis' Palmer's come to visit awhile. She stays here a good deal, winter times. Hers is the back room on this floor."

There was a sudden sound of conflict on the stairway, and the landlady set her lips and hurried to reinforce the "girl" against the expressman. Carter put his foot on the window-sill, and, resting an elbow on his knee, stared out before him. Even here at the South End, where

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it boasts a decent width, Washington street is a busy thoroughfare; and even from an upper window one may follow with interest the irrepressible conflict between the beer wagon and the electric car. Just now it lacked bitterness; for the day was one of November's cheeriest, and its enlivening atmosphere made the labourer glad. The young man was not quite in tune with the time. Clinched fists and profanity would better have suited his mood. His was therefore an uninquisitive gaze; and presently it became uncomprehending, and he relapsed into dismal reverie.

When the *Daily Ledger* changed hands, a month before, a dozen reporters, Carter among them, had been discharged. It was a panic year; expenses had to be kept down. Moreover, there was large choice of experienced men, wiser in the ways of "scoops" than a young fellow, only a year out of a country college, could possibly be. Carter knew his own shortcomings (the city editor had often told him that his work was too damned literary), and he took his dismissal gracefully. Happily he had a little money. Not to compete with the married men who had been turned adrift, he refrained from seeking another place. A few months might be profitably spent, he felt, in the study of his surround-

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ings. There were stories in the lives of men and women. Perhaps a great novel would be born in him and of him when he came to understand his fellows.

It chanced, however, that deeper knowledge of "select boarding-house" types soured and saddened him. The persons he met had, or thought they had, positions to maintain; and the perpetual dress-parade, which at first awed and afterwards amused him, became at last a weariness to the soul. He kept his mental balance by reminding himself that true culture did not require to manifest by self-advertisement. All the more he yearned for contact with "human nature." It was a young man's superficial analysis that prompted his conclusions. It was a wholly youthful impulse that on this day had hurried him to the South End, to live amongst "the people." Already he wondered whether he would enjoy the people. As compared with Chestnut street, Washington street was disconcerting.

True, there was little of the offensive in the scene Carter looked upon, but there was less that was inspiring. Now that it has ceased to be a region of homes, all one can say of that portion of Washington street which lies between Waltham and Northampton streets is that it will

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— sometime — be a part of the business section. In the course of transition it has already passed that initial stage in which every other basement announces “Table Board.” It is now the field on which is continually reënacted the Tragedy of the Small Shop. Carter’s windows faced a narrow street that leads to Shawmut avenue, and his jaundiced vision took in, at either side, a drug-store, a saloon, a coal-office, a fruit-stand, a Chinese laundry, a provision-store, a billiard-room, a milliner’s shop, and a meat-market. It seemed to Carter that with the exception of the saloon, which was quite at home, all the shops wore a certain air of discouraged effort. Evidently the people who lived near them were studious of bargains — which they sought elsewhere. As for the passers-by, few halted before the show-windows, still fewer went in at the doors. Perhaps the tradesmen had ceased to expect it. When a policeman took a handful of nuts the Italian fruiterer did not even think it worth while to pause in his promenade and rearrange the tray. Obviously, between the great shops where frenzied beings buy anything, everything, from sheer love of the sport, and the “neighbourhood shops,” where hurried or neglectful people buy articles that they must have, — between the

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abode of delight and the refuge of necessity, — is a great gulf fixed. Carter wondered if these South End shopkeepers were trying to bridge it with hope.

The roadway and the sidewalks were full enough of incitements to a kind of gaiety, but Carter's desperate temper prompted him rather to dwell on signs of blighted effort. His partial eye saw "Failure" written large on every object; and from such insensate things he argued a moral of disappointment for people who passed by. He romanced a dreary future for a romping baby. He dowered a letter-carrier with ambitions befitting a postmaster-general — only to crush them, of course. Two-score small boys, dismissed from school, rushed, whooping, out of the opposite street, and Carter's morbid fancy promptly moulded them into villains or victims. Here was so much material that the attempt to classify it palled, after a time. What did it matter? Robbers or robbed, they would all fulfil their destinies of unhappiness. And why should he care?

He turned from the window. The landlady had left the door open when she went out, and now the lodging-house odours and noises struck fairly upon his awakened senses. Some one, somewhere below, was singing "Home, Sweet

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Home," and — the conglomerate sound and smell suggested — frying potatoes over an oil-stove. Carter laughed. Then, while he stood listening, the street door slammed, he heard quick footsteps on the stairs, and a boy shot suddenly into the narrow hall and stopped as suddenly before him.

"Hullo!" said the boy, with a friendly grin.

"How do you do, young man?" Carter answered.

"Got all moved in?"

He was a red-haired, blue-eyed, wide-mouthed, freckled lad, and he had that air of alert good humour which notably accompanies this cast of features. It appeared that he wanted to help. The thought was pleasing. Carter modified his critical stare, and stepped out of the doorway.

"Not quite, thank you," he said. "My trunk hasn't shown up yet. Are you one of my new neighbours?"

"Yes, sir." The boy had not hesitated to come in, and when he sat down he crossed his legs as though he felt at home. "Father and I are in the next room. Frank Scanlon's next to that, 'n' Nathan Holl's in the last one. Then up in th' attic there's Shakespeare — his name's Jenks — and George Fairbanks. There's two rooms empty. This house don't keep filled up,

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like that one on the other corner. Miles won't sell booze Sundays."

"I thought there were some young ladies here."

"Oh, yes, Net Palmer 'n' Miss Dow, right under this room. Say, they're all right! I like Miss Dow best, though. If I was big as you I'd marry her. Ain't you ever been married? Why not?"

"Oh, well" — Carter was beginning helplessly, when the boy interrupted. "Did Miss Palmer come this afternoon?" he asked, with manifest eagerness.

"I think so."

"That's bully! I like her!"

"Why?"

The boy seemed disconcerted. He had not expected the question; he was evidently not accustomed to formulate reasons; and perhaps he doubted his new acquaintance's good faith. The answer came slowly, and the boy spoke like one who has to grope for the right word.

"She isn't always tellin' me not to do things," he said. "It doesn't make her head ache when a feller has fun. Bet she brought me some maple sugar," he added suddenly. "She did last year. Guess I'll go see."

He dashed over to the door of the back room

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nearest the head of the stairway, and rapped vigorously. There was no answer, and the boy mournfully returned to his chair again.

"I s'pose she sent her trunk along 'n' then went to Merchant's to see Net," he suggested.

In the abstract the small boy was well understood by Carter — who, like most unmarried persons, had his theories. The concrete small boy was a trifle terrifying. Carter liked this lad's honest face, and, spite of the dismal forebodings he might have felt a half hour before concerning any boy, was more than willing to be on good terms with him. Yet how to show friendliness? He fell back, after an interval of silence, on that perilous conundrum which, to the unsophisticated adult, seems so reasonable and safe:

"Do you like to go to school?" he asked.

"Huh! Course not!" said the boy, calmly; and again there was silence. It was broken when the woman below-stairs lifted up her voice once more in song; but Carter closed his door. He filled and lighted his pipe and gazed absently out into the deepening dusk. The boy sat still, and Carter had grown almost oblivious to his presence when there came a startling reminder.

"Are you a Christian?" the boy demanded.

"What?" In the suddenness of the attack the young man had nearly dropped his pipe.

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He regained it by a dexterous catch, but the appetite for tobacco had gone from him, and he could do nothing but survey his questioner. "What are you getting at now?" he asked.

"Oh, nothin'," said the boy, cheerfully. "Only, if you was, I was goin' to tell Mis' Palmer there was one in the house."

"What business is it of hers?"

"She says Boston's a wicked place. I s'pose she's lonesome."

To gain time, Carter turned to light the gas and pull down the curtains. He thought he knew the Palmer type of woman. He was conscious of a potential dislike for the particular individual that the boy named. It seemed a small thing, nevertheless, to criticise a child's friend, and he resolved to change the subject. Effort was spared him, for just then, at the sound of a step on the stairway, the boy rushed to the door and intercepted the newcomer.

"Hullo, Nathan," he cried. "You got the bounce again?"

A young man paused, laughed, and looked in. "I asked off," he explained. "Goin' to a Socialist meetin' down to Lynn."

"This is the new lodger, Nathan," the boy went on eagerly. "His name's Carter, and he writes for the papers."

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The young man came forward a little, revealing a pale, intelligent face, lighted by bright black eyes. "Pleased to meet you, Mr. Carter," he said. "My name's Holl. This fresh kid been givin' you an earache? We drop him downstairs if he gets too numerous."

"Ah, gwon!" the boy had begun — not at all resentfully — when a voice from below diverted his thoughts. "Guess Mis' Miles wants me to go to the store," he explained. His departure was so ludicrously sudden that the young men found themselves smiling over it; and following the smile Carter felt an impulse of hospitality. "Come in, Mr. Holl," he said.

"Can't stop, thank you. All I'm here for's a clean collar. I've got to get supper and light out for Lynn. You found a place to eat, yet?"

"Well, no. I hadn't thought about it."

"Come over with me, and try the Klondike. It's as cheap as any — fifteen cents — and it ain't so dirty as some."

"I'll do it," Carter decided; and when his new friend had put on the clean collar they set forth. There was a moment of waiting, at the foot of the stairway; they stood aside, to admit three women. The entrance was as dimly lighted as such places usually are, and Carter's fullest impression of the trio was summed up in the

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certainty that two of them were young. But even though his eyes were held, his ears were at his service, and he realised as he went down the steps that one of the girls had spoken of him :

“ Ah, there, Floss,” she had whispered ; “ my mash ! ”

II

HOLL overheard, and he smiled and glanced at Carter; but Carter made no sign. They silently breasted that tidal wave of humanity which, when darkness falls, begins to set towards the South End. It had not yet overflowed the Klondike restaurant, and the bright-faced Irish waitress was prompt to serve them. Holl spoke to her familiarly, but not flippantly. The tone of the replies proved that she liked and trusted him.

"Maggie, this is Mr. Carter," Holl said when the girl appeared a second time with an extra, uncalled-for plate of hot biscuits. "He's a new lodger at Miles's. If he gets to comin' here you want to take good care of him."

"Sure!" she answered briefly. "Your friends are all right — no need to tell you that, Mr. Holl." She went on to gather up some dishes from the next table, but stopped to speak again on her way back. "You know George has got another skate?" she asked. "He was in here with it, this noon. Ain't he a peach?"

Holl looked up at her gravely. His eyes showed perplexity as well as distress. "I'm sorry," he said. "I wish you'd told me at first."

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I'd go after him now — only I've agreed to be in Lynn to-night."

"He ain't worth your thinkin' of, Mr. Holl!"

"Yes, he is. And if that's the way other people feel, I've *got* to think about him!"

The words were rather a soliloquy than a reply, but the girl fancied herself reproved, and went, shamefaced, away. Carter, also overhearing, began to respect his companion. He wanted to make that evident, perhaps to offer some personal service; yet Holl did not open the way. He had dropped his knife and fork and was looking helplessly around the room — resonant now with the clatter of crockery and the din of voices. Presently he stood up and made a gesture of invitation. In answer to the appeal, Carter inferred, an old man came forward and sat stolidly down at their table.

"Mr. Carter, this is Mr. Jenks, another of our crowd," Holl explained.

"Maggie says Fairbanks is drunk again," he added hurriedly. "I've got to go off to-night; I'm late now. Don't you want to hunt him up, and get him home?"

The old man rested his elbows on the table, and stared at it thoughtfully. Maggie came with his supper, but neither his attitude nor his expression altered while she pettishly displaced his

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hands to make room for dishes. Holl rose again, wearing the downcast look of defeat, and reached for his coat. Then the other spoke.

"I kind o' like you, Nathan," he said, "but that don't blind me to the fact that you're a cussèd fool."

"It's Fairbanks we're talkin' about."

"Well, if I see him, I'll head him towards Miles's," the old man said, with the accent of finality.

Holl seemed to be satisfied. He smiled a good-night to them both and hastened away, putting off many detaining greetings that came to him from others. Carter sat still; he felt lonely; and, even above the longing for companionship, he was curious about this man who appeared so placidly immovable. He remembered that the boy at Miles's had called him "Shakespeare" Jenks, and he wondered why. Of course it was impossible to ask the question. Indeed, it seemed doubtful whether Jenks would notice any attempt to make talk. As it chanced, while Carter played with his spoon and pondered possible overtures, the old man himself was inspired to words.

"He's a clever boy," he said, as though Holl had but just left them. "I was a good deal like him once — thought I was responsible for the

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race. Lord God! How many of that kind I've seen in sixty years! And we all end the same way."

Carter nodded understandingly.

"Yes. As we grow older we learn that patent medicines won't cure social diseases, and every man is bound to go to the devil his own road. I generally vote the Socialist ticket, mainly to please Nathan, and I'm going to look after Fairbanks for the same reason; but I know that both deeds count for about as much, in the eternal scheme, as a horsefly butting a brick wall. What's *your* pet plan for disinfecting the universe?" he broke off abruptly. "And what's your business?"

"Oh, I don't know." The young man was taken by surprise and felt himself at a disadvantage. "I'm a reporter — and writer," he explained lamely. "Of course I'd like to write something — worth while."

"Of course. You haven't crossed the deadline. When you get to be thirty — or sooner, if you find a girl to marry — you'll want to write something there's money in." The speaker threw down his napkin, with the manner of one who would put away his last illusion. "Did you ever chase up a drunkard?" he demanded in the same instant.

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"No," was the wondering response.

"Better take a walk with me, then. I suppose," he muttered sombrely, as they stopped at the counter to pay for their fifteen-cent meal, — "I suppose Fairbanks was an altruist on his twenty-first birthday — and now he guzzles South End whiskey."

"Who is Fairbanks?"

"He's a carpenter."

The tone was that of a man who does not care to be questioned, and Carter heeded its admonition. Now, indeed, conversation would not have been easy, for they were in the thick of the Washington-street crowd — an interpenetrate mass of people, who, having done the day's work, were eager to be amused. Energetic and youthful good humour seemed to characterise this gathering. Its very rudenesses of speech and behaviour suggested vitality rather than vice. Carter might have drifted into the mood of perfect sympathy, had he not glanced across, just then, at that street-corner which, for some occult reason, seems to attract and hold all disgusting human types. He sneered, and sickened, and offered a cold shoulder to all his impetuous neighbours.

Jenks followed the young man's eyes. He seemed to read his thoughts. "'Tis unwholesome, isn't it?" he growled. The crowd caught and

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held them a moment at the sidewalk's edge, but both men turned their backs to the bleared and sodden loafers and looked instead at the boys who were hurrying up the steps of the Mammoth Dime Museum. Billboards flanking the entrance were lurid and provocative with the charms of a new dancer, La Bella Orienta. Jenks studied them methodically.

"George says she's great on a summerset split," he volunteered, with an unsmiling face. "Want to go in?"

"Curious about Fairbanks," he added as they struck into Dover street. "It's generally a protracted season of burlesque and variety shows that sets him off on a jamboree. Of course *that* place" — he indicated the Mammoth by a backward nod — "is comparatively harmless. Children cry for it. But it reminds me. When George starts out on a theatrical debauch he goes where most of the performers wear tights and the audience unanimously spits on the floor. I think the atmosphere of freedom demoralises him. After he's been going the rounds for five or six weeks he begins to think how much better he'd enjoy that kind of a show if he had a glass eye and a magenta breath, like the fellow in the next seat, — or that's the way I philosophise it. So he concludes to take one drink

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before the performance; and the next thing we know, all the slates are off the roof."

He tramped across the street, without a word of warning or apology, and stared comprehensively into a saloon. Carter waited. He wanted to hear more, and he was fearful that almost any movement on his part might impede the other's train of thought. Forbearance had its reward, for when Jenks came back he proceeded as though there had been no interruption:

"The trouble with Fairbanks, you see, is that he has no absorbing interest — no passion, not so much as a fad. Even a wife would be better than nothing. If he'd marry, or get converted, or go to collecting postage-stamps, he'd be more likely to let rum alone. A live man can't do his day's work and then spend the evening in a six-by-nine room, thinking about the next day's work. After a little of that, something's bound to snap."

He broke off abruptly to enter another bar-room, into which Carter absent-mindedly followed. It was the restful interval between the departure of the "six-o'clock crowd" and the arrival of the "night gang;" only three men were in the place, and the bartender, after dismissing through the "office" a haggard old woman who carried a bottle under her shawl,

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turned towards the newcomers with his best professional air of cordial anticipation. It changed to chastened friendliness as he recognised the older man. "Good evenin', Mr. Jenks," he said deferentially.

"How are you, Matt? Seen Mr. Fairbanks lately?"

"He was in here not an hour ago. I wouldn't let him have any. I think he went up the avenue — to Cronan's, maybe. You and your friend have a taste of somethin', Mr. Jenks?"

"No, thank you, Matt. That is" — He glanced at Carter questioningly; the young man shook his head. "No, thank you," Jenks repeated. "Was Fairbanks very full?"

"Jagged crossways and up and down," one of the loafers put in.

"Aw, close up, Jerry!" said the bartender, crossly. "*I'm* talkin' with the gentleman!" In the next moment he had brushed away his scowl and resumed his gentler voice. "Well," he admitted, "Mr. Fairbanks had a pretty good load — yes. Oh, not so's he couldn't get home all right, if he wanted to.

"Have a cigar?" he hastened to add, as they moved towards the door. "Well, good-night, gents."

Up Shawmut avenue was now the road. It

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was darker here, and Jenks felt it needful to keep an eye on those seductive sheltered doorways that might appeal to a man who found his feet a burden. His companion had nothing to say, and they went on in silence until they reached the first block of small shops that breaks the long line of lodging-houses. Here Jenks halted, and Carter perceived the reason when Alfred, the small boy who had made his acquaintance at Miles's, came out of one of the shops and joined them.

"Hullo, again!" the boy said, with a cordial grin. "I been in to order a basket o' coal. Say," he added earnestly, "you fellers better come along back with me! Net Palmer and Frank Scanlon are goin' to the theatre, but now they're singin' coon songs. It's great!"

"Have you seen Mr. Fairbanks, Alfred?" Jenks queried.

"Sure! I started him home."

"How's that?"

"I told him Pat McCullagh said he'd split his head open if he caught him on his beat again," the boy said cheerfully.

"Say, I'm goin' to run," he announced before they had quite digested the news. "Frank said he'd sing 'Enjoy Yourselves.'"

He cut across Waltham street and was lost

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to sight. On Jenks and Carter the promise of melody apparently made no impression. They did not even discuss the invitation as they walked on up the avenue, though Carter asked, "Who is Frank Scanlon?"

"Printer. Foreman of the *Saturday Star*."

"Did I understand that you're a printer also?" the young man ventured, after a while.

"Yes — and proof-reader," Jenks answered laconically.

"Proof-reading must be hard work."

"Yes."

Evidently the old man preferred to avoid this theme. Carter, glancing at him sidewise, even fancied that his pale-blue eyes had filled with defiance and that the grizzled beard had taken an aggressive upward tilt. For want of a more engaging subject, perhaps, Carter's attention presently fell upon a group of ill-clad children that played noisily in the gutter. "Poor little dirty devils!" he muttered half-unconsciously.

"They're only a part of the double-barrelled problem that faces you everywhere in a big city: how some people live, and why they want to."

"*They* can't help it," Carter suggested.

"None of us can."

"You're a fatalist, then?"

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"Oh, no." Jenks permitted himself a sardonic chuckle. "I'm a good Presbyterian. I believe in foreordination—provided you let me define it as inheritance plus environment. Foreordination granted, it follows that the sensible thing to do is to take what comes and ask no questions. Those young ones, for instance,—they may be happy, unless they begin to holler for shoes and stockings, and three square meals."

"Do you mean to say that you've outgrown ambition and desire?"

"By no means," Jenks answered. "But I've learned that my worst troubles have come from getting things that I thought I wanted. So I try not to want things. Nevertheless"—he chuckled again, more amiably—"I can't help remembering there's a T.D. pipe up in my room that may be lonesome without me. I think I'll go home and fulfil its destiny."

"You expect to find our friend there?"

"Oh, yes. Fairbanks is generally reasonable at this stage of the game. If the boy, even, suggested he'd be better off in the house he'd probably make for the house."

Jenks evidently meant what he said; for, though the object of their search was not in the perspective at Miles's, he seemed neither apprehensive nor disturbed. He made no comment

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and uttered no word of parting, but went straight to his attic. Carter, climbing the stairs more leisurely, had a glimpse at the second landing of a tall, pale, grey-eyed girl whom he took to be Miss Dow. That she somehow lent distinction to the room was the first impression his eyes telegraphed his brain. Involuntarily he slowed his steps, admiring not so much her clear-cut features as the poise of her head and the graceful sweep of the rounded arms as she gathered and knotted her hair. But when she realised another's presence she glanced at him coldly and closed her door; and the young man, who felt vexed at the action, was about to hurry up the second stairway, when the landlady stayed him.

"This is Mis' Palmer, Mr. Carter," the landlady said. She thrust forward a substantial, elderly woman, whose florid complexion and prominent eyes were somehow out of keeping with her sensitive lips and chin. "You two are near neighbours," Mrs. Miles went on jocularly. "I hope you won't quarrel!"

"I guess I sha'n't begin," said Carter's new acquaintance. She spoke in the slow, thoughtful fashion of one who has lived alone and is out of the habit of social chat and banter. There was something wholesome and motherly about

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the woman, and Carter forgot the prejudice which Alfred's words had inspired, and tried to show himself friendly. Hearing their voices, the landlady's bluff and burly husband came in his shirtsleeves from the kitchen, and, though he did not go so far as to give up either his pipe or his newspaper, proved cheerfully willing to talk. As with one consent, they retreated to that eternal refuge of people who have yet to know each other, the weather. Mr. Miles contributed a reminiscence of a "tender" fellow-workman who shingled a house, on a bright November day, and incidentally froze an ear. His wife told about a conscientious "girl" who, by persistent sidewalk-scrubbing in cold weather, established and maintained a series of man-traps that made the neighbourhood notorious. Mrs. Palmer smiled and listened. The attitude befitted her, Carter thought.

Altogether, it was homelike, this informal conference in the hall, and Carter went upstairs feeling refreshed and contented. Shaped by the novel surroundings, his bedtime musings — wholly unliterary in form — were a curious jumble of Jenks, Miss Dow, the boy Alfred, Fairbanks, Mr. Miles, and Mrs. Palmer; but no recollection was sufficiently vivid to keep him awake. Fairbanks was the last subject that

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engaged his mind. Perhaps that accounted for the influence that disturbed his rest—a dim and doubtful consciousness that some one on the next lower landing had spent a frantic half-hour in hammering Miles's bedroom door and adjuring that gentleman to get up and give him a drink.

III

DURING the days that immediately followed, it inspired in Carter much innocent pride to see how quickly he became acquainted with his housemates. That they accepted him so completely he ascribed — not in so many words, of course — to his personal charm. As a matter of fact, it was mainly because of his willingness to listen to other persons and interest himself in their affairs; this complaisance, which originated in a kind heart, being promoted by shyness and strengthened, at this time, by lack of occupation. Possibly the boundless curiosity that a good reporter always feels had also something to do with his receptive attitude; but he was not conscious of any ulterior design. To put these trustful people into print would have seemed to him, then, like profaning the sanctity of home.

It was clear to him, none the less, that, little as he might think of it, his connection with the press had an effect on his associates. Unquestionably it procured him a call from Alfred's father, a thin little man with a discontented, irritable face, who urged that he "write a piece" about the Jesuit plot underlying the appointment of a deputy street commissioner. This

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interview gave no great joy to either; but the young man found it rather agreeable to serve as guide, philosopher, and friend when Miss Dow lost her purse and wished to learn how to advertise. And twice between Thursday and Sunday he experienced the delight, known to all newspaper men, of being consulted as authority. Frank Scanlon asked him, What ever became of Josie Mansfield? Mrs. Palmer inquired, Whether there was a Methodist church at Arlington Heights? Happily being able to solve each conundrum, he visibly grew in repute.

Before Sunday came he had met all the lodgers, with the exception of Fairbanks,— of whom, indeed, he had had one vanishing view as, clutching at the railing, the sick and repentant drunkard stumbled shakily downstairs to the bathroom and back again. On his second evening, which was Friday, Mrs. Miles had made him free of her parlour, in itself an unattractive room enough, but commanding a fascinating sweep of the kaleidoscopic street. And here, while he dreamed over the movement and mystery hidden or revealed by the electric lights, Alfred had found him and, on one and another pretext, had lured various persons through the door. Miss Palmer and her mother came in

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together; and the former, a plump, energetic, voluble young woman, extremely self-possessed in manner, at once appealed to him for aid and sympathy. She and ma were going away over to the Back Bay, to the prayer-meeting in the Christian Science Church: wouldn't they have to stand up all through the service? and didn't he think it was horrid of ma to make her go? It was evident that Mrs. Palmer greatly enjoyed all this. Carter quite won her heart when he condoled with the daughter on the possession of an unnatural parent. But to Alfred, who as the promoter of the interview felt himself responsible for its success, the joke was not so evident. He had been scrubbing restlessly from one chair to the next, waiting an opening for talk, but at these words he sat still, blinking solemnly at the audacious speaker; and though he offered no comment but a reproachful glance, he pointedly avoided Carter for a whole day.

The Sabbath brought reconciliation between these two. Furthermore, it deepened and clarified Carter's knowledge of the others — Alfred's father being, as it chanced, the first to reveal himself. Lulled by the Sunday quiet outside, Carter slept later than usual that morning; and when at length he waked and raised his curtain he looked out into a drizzling rain that tempted him

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to forego breakfast. He lighted a pipe, bunched the pillows behind his back, and lay down again. Idleness had its advantages, he reflected; no city editor could make him cover a sermon assignment to-day. He lazily pitied Murray and West of the *Ledger*, who in the natural course of things had already been "on call" for an hour, missing that morning nap which a tired man finds most precious. To be sure (it occurred to him as a saving after-thought), they were married men, and people who are blessed with young children are liable to be stampeded out of bed at daybreak, whether or no! Then his inconsequent fancy addressed the problem, how people bring up families in five-room flats. He wondered vaguely at the heroism which enables a woman to face the possibility of babies in an apartment house. Nor did he underestimate the courage of the man. Could *he* love any girl so fondly that he would wish to be always under her eye, or within her hearing, for twelve hours out of the twenty-four?

It was while he pondered this question that he became aware that something out of the common was going on in Nichols's room. His own room directly joined it; when, as at present, his closet door was ajar, it was hard not to hear an unusual sound or movement. Carter did not intend to

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play the eavesdropper, but Nichols's voice was edged with an exasperation so acute that it fairly pierced the wall:

"Well, what *is* the golden text?" Nichols demanded.

An indistinct mumbling succeeded; then:

"I said the golden text, not the golden rule! God sake! is that all the Bible you've learnt in two years? You get that golden text by Sunday-school time or I'll hang your hide out there on the fence! You hear?"

Save for the angry snort that emphasised the threat, there was silence for a moment. The manner of the next question showed that Nichols had somewhat recovered himself. "What's the lesson about?" he asked. "Tower of Babel? That's right, my son. Now, what did Noah plant after the flood?"

It seemed that Alfred hazarded two guesses. A mild "No" met the one answer; but the second "No" was pronounced. "Any damn fool ought to know they didn't have p'taters then!" the father commented, in a tone of deep disgust. "Noah planted a vineyard. That means, he set out grape-vines. Think you can remember it till you get up to Columbus avenue? Well, then, from whom did the people after the flood descend?"

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"Noah!" cried Alfred, triumphantly.

"Yes, course they did. But that ain't the whole of it. Noah had three sons; you know the names of 'em?"

"Ham, Sham, and Japhet." Alfred felt sure of this also; his voice showed it.

"No, it wa'n't Sham — it was Shem. But you're doin' pretty good, my son! Now can you tell me, what did these people have in common?"

Evidently Alfred could not tell, and was not brave enough to speculate; but the father was charitably ready to help him on:

"Now, see," he began. "Here's Mr. Carter and Frank and Fairbanks and Miles and me. We don't work at the same trade, and we don't eat together, and some of us has got more money than others, and we was all born in different places, most likely, and we're different in lots o' ways, — but when we talk to each other we catch on every time. What is it we all have that's the same?"

Alfred must have ventured a suggestion in reply to this, for his father's voice was raised in wrath again:

"Tongues — hell!" he said. "It's language we all have alike — all but the Chink in the laundry and the Dago over on the corner. The

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people after the flood all spoke the same language, see?

"Say, Alfud," he added after an interval that may have been devoted to reflection, "you ain't studied this lesson! No use to go any further. Now you take your book, and don't you lift your eyes off'n the page till you know it by heart. If you ain't learnt it, next time I try you, you and me'll have a fuss!" Then the door slammed. Nichols had made a dramatic exit.

Carter jumped out of bed, slipped on his dressing-gown, and started, chuckling, for the bathroom. He paused as he reached it, perceiving that Scanlon's door, which was opposite, stood open; and Scanlon, turning from the mirror to see who passed, was quick to read the expression of his face.

"Guess you've been up against the Sunday-school lesson," Scanlon said. "Hot stuff, ain't it? Say, come in and have a drink with me."

"I don't mind."

Scanlon pulled forward his best chair. He excused himself for a moment, and wiped the lather from his face; then he went to his closet and confidently reached for a bottle — which proved to be empty. "Fairbanks!" he muttered. "And if Jimmy Whiskers doesn't come and pay back that booze there'll be trouble."

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"Oh, well," he added aloud and more cheerfully, as he unlocked his trunk and took out another bottle, "we can fall back on the Emergency Hospital here. Say when!"

"Here's more power to Alfred's memory!" Carter gave the toast.

"Or less to the old man's tongue," Scanlon amended. "It's lucky you take notice of such things," he added frankly. "Fact is, I thought at first you were one of the stiff sort. You see, you've got to mix in, when you're with a crowd like this, or you'd be lonesome. You'll feel, sometimes, as though you slept on the sidewalk and changed your shirt under a lamp-post; but, take it the year round, it's more comfy to get right into the push."

"Everybody seems friendly," Carter ventured.

"Oh, sure! You can lend a dollar any time, in this house." Both men laughed. "And that ain't sayin', either, that you couldn't borrow one too. It's a pretty fair average gang. Don't talk much about heaven, and don't raise much hell. I've been here two years, but I've never had to scrap with anybody yet—and I'm a good deal of a crank myself."

Remembering then that his toilet was to make, Carter spoke some words of genial commonplace and rose to leave. Scanlon forestalled

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him. "Hold on," he said. "Goin' anywhere next Thursday — Thanksgiving Day?"

"No," was the quiet answer. "I haven't any near relations — or many friends."

"Then come to my Thanksgivin' dinner — in this room. Does seem funny, don't it? The girls stumped me to get up a spread right here, and the banquet's got to come off if we have to eat from the window-sill. I buy the turk, and then I take it out and get it cooked, you know. Won't be anybody here but the house crowd."

"Thank you, I'll be glad to come."

"Good enough! That'll make ten of us — countin' Alfred. Drop in the night before, if you get a chance, and help me peel the paper off the wall!"

Then Carter went to his sponge bath, and afterwards took up his dumb-bells, congratulating himself, meanwhile, that a gloomy day had opened auspiciously. Yet the dumb-bell practice was not quite a success, simply because Alfred and Alfred's father were in his thoughts — and no man can afford to indulge in merri-ment while swinging twelve-pound weights. After he had wrenched his left shoulder a little he awakened to this truth; so he put on his coat and set out in search of something to eat.

The storm was increasing; few persons were

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abroad; and these, whipped by a fierce east wind and pelted with rain, had that ludicrous air of undignified dejection which made it equally impossible for the beholder to sympathise with their suffering or fear their wrath. Carter snuggled his chin deep in his mackintosh and smiled discreetly at the helpless people who were blown towards him and those others who, umbrella-blinded, strove to go his way. He felt sheltered and safe, as well as good-natured. He even loitered at shop windows, conceiving tributes to the artistic sense of a fishmonger and a shoeman.

But this, like all superior moods, had to end; and when he had eaten his combination breakfast-and-luncheon, bought his Sunday papers, and started home again, it came to him with a sudden shock that he did not care to walk much farther in the rain, and that there was a long day ahead. It would be hardly worth while to add his modicum of slop and steam to the dripping congregation in the Every-Day Church; better to stay indoors and smoke, and write, and read. After all, there were thousands of "roomers," here at the South End, who had not all his resources,—women, who could not smoke; men and women both who did not write. For these was invented the forty-page Sunday paper!

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While he walked he pondered their condition—the deprivations, the little miseries, inseparable from it. Perhaps he could get up a local story of “A Roomer’s Sunday” which would be worth space-rates to the *Ledger*. If only he might “work in” the people at Miles’s! But this suggestion was at once rejected as disloyal. When he came up to Jenks and Nichols standing in their and his doorway, and gazing from that shelter into the bleak and dismal street, he even fancied that he blushed, recalling it. Yet he was able to speak collectedly enough. “Going to church?” he asked impersonally.

“I’ve no reason to suppose it would gratify the Almighty to see me get wet,” Jenks calmly answered.

“Guess I’ll go up to the Patriotic Meetin’ this afternoon, if it holds up a little,” was Nichols’s response.

Jenks’s eyes narrowed to a thin line of steely blue, but he stared steadfastly before him and said nothing. Carter did not feel it needful to make any rejoinder; but he turned, latch-key in hand, for a last glance at the wind-swept thoroughfare. A newsboy scurried by, lifting his face questioningly. “*Press and Ledger?*” he said. “All about the murder!”

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"Wonder what murder that is?" It was Nichols who spoke.

"Some damn Jesuit killed an A.P.A., maybe," Jenks suggested stolidly.

Nichols raised his head and thrust his chin aggressively forward. He had the manner of one who regards not the opinion of man, but willingly improves an opportunity to explain himself to the universe. "I d'know's I can say I'm a Christian," he declared, "but I'm a Protestant, bet your life!" He had spoken to nobody in particular; nobody answered. "Well," he added, after a moment, "I must go in and learn my boy his Sunday-school lesson. So long!"

Carter smiled over the remembrance of that other lesson, but he did not share it. "Come up and have a smoke with me, Mr. Jenks?" he asked.

"I generally put in my Sundays at the Public Library, thank you. Do you read Spanish?"

Carter shook his head.

"I know a little French and German and Italian, but Spanish is beyond me. Looks as though I'd have to learn it. I suppose," he added whimsically, "since there were heroes before Agamemnon it's safe to say there were dramatists before Calderon. 'Twon't do to neglect 'em!"

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"You're interested in the drama?"

"The Elizabethan drama. Of course it can't be fairly estimated or understood if you omit collateral readings in other languages. That's the curse of it!" Jenks burst out suddenly. "To do justice to so great a subject a man ought to live about three hundred and fifty years. And when I tell you I realise this, and still give my fragments of time, nights and Sundays, to the study of it, you'll appreciate the force of my admission that I'm an ass!"

He hoisted his umbrella as he spoke, and started for an advancing Belt Line car. The motorman put on the brake. With difficulty, because of the wet rails, he brought the car to a stand. Evidently then Jenks changed his purpose. He turned, in the middle of the street, and, followed by the lively comments of the motorman, walked back and into the house. His demeanour throughout was so serene and dignified that the whole proceeding had a flavour of genius. Carter took advantage of the opened door and went up the stairs after him, but found no words worth saying to one so transparently guided by the Inward Light. Now he perceived why the old man was known as "Shakespeare": he was a student of the Elizabethans — and, like the greatest, he was "Fancy's child"!

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Often during the afternoon Carter's mind reverted to this unique moment at the doorway, and he longed for another revelation of Jenks; but Jenks was invisible. With the help of many pipes and a fifteen-minutes' talk with Alfred, the young man bridged the long hours to suppertime. When he came from the restaurant at night, tobacco palled. His books were powerless to charm. Darkness and storm had so enshrouded the street that little or nothing was to be seen from his window. Gradually he became the prey of that irrational homesickness which sometimes assails a man who has no home. For a while he fondled the emotion, and tasted the luxury of self-pity. Finally, though, he pulled himself together and resolved to go down to the parlour. Even the landlady, eternally calculating the number of cents in a dime, would be better company than his own dull thoughts!

Descending hurriedly, then, while his courage was still at the sticking-point, he found the deed rewarded beyond his hope. Miss Dow was in the room, and alone; and her greeting told him that she, too, had felt the evil influence of the day, and welcomed diversion. He had an idea she might like to talk about her work (since *he* did about his), and he spoke at once of the magnitude of Merchant's. She told him, ami-

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ably enough, that she was at the glove counter, and Miss Palmer was in the children's underwear department; but she did not rouse to enthusiasm. He suggested, then, that she and Miss Palmer came home before six o'clock, on the previous Thursday evening, and he argued that the firm showed rare consideration in the matter of working hours. She explained — with intonations he was powerless to follow — that she seldom left the shop before seven; that on the afternoon in question Miss Palmer had a "faint spell," and her friend, the floorwalker, permitted her to go, and to have assistance. The tepid terms in which Miss Dow spoke of her chum persuaded Carter that an east wind might wear on the nerves of room-mates also. And "I don't think Mrs. Palmer likes me very well!" the girl said, all at once, in a hurt, appealing way that gave the words the value of a priceless confidence. Carter was not worthy of it. He could only protest, "Why!" and "Oh, surely!" — restrained from any effective utterance by the self-consciousness that, when a young woman was present, sometimes did afflict him. Yet he had a curious feeling, later on, that she regretted her words as soon as they were spoken, and thanked God that her hearer was dumb.

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She talked with more freedom, and with no apparent wish to revise her judgments when, by those imperceptible steps which lead to gossip, they got to the point of speaking about their neighbours. "Mr. Jenks *is* clever," she said warmly, "and he's kind, too. Mr. Holl calls himself an atheist — all the same, I call him a pretty good Christian! And Mr. Scanlon seems thoughtless and careless, but I don't believe he'd ever deceive a man or woman who trusted him!"

"You seem to be able to speak well of everybody," laughed Carter. "What about Nichols and Fairbanks?"

"Oh," she answered, laughing also, "Mr. Nichols means well. Mr. Fairbanks is — unfortunate." She was quite serious now. "I don't like to condemn anybody as long as I feel that, deep down in his heart, he's sorry, and would like to do better. The world is so full of trouble, even when you don't do anything to bring it on! And just think how black it must look, sometimes, to a man who has a bad habit to fight!"

"Thank you for saying that. Perhaps I needed to be reminded of it."

"Why, I wasn't hinting at *you*!" Miss Dow protested, blushing. "Of course a girl doesn't

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know much about such things. I was only trying to tell you what I think."

"I'm sure it's the way everybody ought to think," said Carter, gravely. "I'll try to remember."

"Now you're making fun of me!" the girl exclaimed half angrily.

"Upon my word, I'm not! I mean everything I say!"

She looked at him long and keenly. He believed that he bore the scrutiny well; but she was not wholly convinced of his good faith. It was thus, at any rate, that Carter interpreted her next movement. "Mrs. Palmer has gone back to her room," she said abruptly, "so I guess I'll go to mine. But," she added, a little roguishly, "if I was sure you *did* mean to hint that I was trying to preach, perhaps I'd just ask you why I shouldn't! This is Sunday!"

IV

THAT Sunday sermon followed Carter, and in all its implications abode with him. As he thought it over he realised, more clearly than heretofore, that he was not a god on a tower, able to eye inferiors through a telescope: he was only one of the crowd at Miles's; and since he could not be superior — that is, independent — wisdom decreed that he be not censorious.

In fact the situation called for more than passive charity: it exacted neighbourliness. He was not unsympathetic by nature; and when he had thoroughly grasped the truth that no lodger liveth to himself it strengthened his bent to notice that most of the events in his uneventful days were brought about by somebody else. For instance, on the very next morning after his talk with Miss Dow he won a local renown by putting out a fire; but it was Katie, the girl, who gave him the chance by blowing up the oil-stove. On Wednesday, two days later, he noted a magnificent story-scheme; but Mrs. Palmer had suggested it when she invited him to weep with her on behalf of a friend whose only son had, in a moment of passion, enlisted in the regular army. Carter was shrewd enough to perceive the "moral" of such occurrences; he resolved to

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heed it, even against his inclination. Thus on Thursday, when he joined the Thanksgiving party in Scanlon's room, his act was the outcome of conscience and will rather than desire; in fact, he bravely suppressed premonitory tremors of distaste, swearing that he would not seem unfriendly or "proud."

He had cultivated this generous temper all the forenoon, while Scanlon made business-like excursions up and down stairs and Alfred raced noisily to and from the bake-shop. He was writing a review of a friend's book (men have been sainted for enduring milder martyrdoms), and though he wavered between tears and curses as he strove to adjust the permissible lie to the indispensable truth, he glorified in his own heroic abnegation. When Alfred banged the door and cried, "Frank says dinner's ready!" he felt like looking in the glass to see if he could detect his halo. What he did do was less exalted, and perhaps in the nature of confession: he smiled ruefully at the perfunctory pages and, in the subdued manner of an escaped prisoner, followed the boy to Scanlon's room.

Others had preceded him. Jenks stood aloof, at one of the windows. Nichols sat, stiffly alert, in the most commanding corner. Holl, leaning against the mantel, beamed on all; and he

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hastened to introduce Fairbanks, a tall man with a noticeable stoop and a conspicuous yellow beard. Scanlon himself was not among them; but presently Alfred, who had found it impossible to wait in idleness, dashed upstairs with a fresh reminder that the host had not forgotten. "Frank says, every feller bring his own chair!" he ordered. Carter obeyed. When he returned to the room the women had come in; and a moment later appeared Scanlon, flushed and triumphant, bearing a big platter.

"Will you walk into my turkey?
For on it there are no flies!"

Scanlon spouted jubilantly as he put down the dish. "Mrs. Palmer, will you sit there, please? You here at my left, Miss Dow. Miss Palmer, will you hold up the other end of the table? Fix yourselves, boys! Now all shut your eyes, while I try to carve this bird!"

"Nathan might be asking a blessing," Miss Palmer suggested. She was quite serious about it. Her mother evidently inferred that Holl had changed his creed. But when Mrs. Palmer's glad inviting smile encountered his glance of amused annoyance she looked so dubiously from her daughter to her host that Scanlon felt it needful to create a diversion. "They told me at the

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bakery that this was bread stuffing — dressing,” he said. “That all right, Mrs. Palmer?”

“I gener’ly put potatoes in mine,” the woman answered mildly. “Of course it’s all as you’ve been used.”

“Why didn’t you have it stuffed with stuffin’, Frank?” Alfred demanded; but, before any one could answer, his thoughts took another turn. “Here comes Katie with cramberry sauce!” he cried. “Say, Frank, give me lots of cramberry sauce?”

“Sure, Mike! Katie won’t forget you. Move up a little, will you, boys? Now can you get along that side, between the table and the wall, Katie? Tight squeeze, ain’t it? Don’t you wish you had a pair of stilts?”

“It’s great fun to be crowded this way,” Miss Palmer volunteered beamingly. “Makes me think of Tremont row on a Saturday night.”

“What’s become of the folks to-day, Katie?” It was Fairbanks who asked the question while Mrs. Miles’s servant waited for Scanlon to fill the plates.

“Gone over to South Boston to dinner.”

“So? It’d take a mighty big turkey to pull me over to South Boston. That’s the place God made when he was tired.”

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Scanlon winked at him warningly, and turned an anxious face to Mrs. Palmer.

"What can I serve you?" he inquired. "Wing?—and a piece of the breast, of course. Leg, did you say, Miss Dow? You like the dark meat, too, don't you, Miss Palmer? Boys, I shall give you any old thing. That goes, eh?"

"Where you goin' to get your dinner, Katie?" said Holl, suddenly.

"Oh, I'll make out."

"Well, you ought to have some dinner!" Holl persisted uneasily.

Miss Palmer's eyes grew threatening and resentful. Scanlon was quick to interpret the sign. "All right, Katie," he said briskly. "We'll help ourselves, now. I'll call you when we want the tea and the dessert." He breathed a sigh of relief as he saw the girl depart. But the incident was not quite closed.

"If she'd stayed a minute longer Nathan would have asked her to get dinner with us!" Miss Palmer commented.

"Well, why shouldn't she?"

"A servant girl!"

"I'm a servant myself."

"Oh, well, that's different," was the impatient rejoinder. "You're a man!"

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"Very true," Jenks nodded. "Katie has no rights. She doesn't wear pants."

If Holl had any notion of questioning the logic or the sarcasm a glance at his host's expressive face must have deterred him. Evidently Scanlon felt that he had a reputation to gain. Touching the food, his mind was easy: that was shown by the complacency with which he viewed the skeleton of the turkey; but merely to provide a good dinner is a small part of a host's duty, and Scanlon aimed to establish his guests in genial content. Most of all he kept an anxious eye upon the grey-haired woman at his side — his alert and mischievous air obscured, as he attended her, by a new, strange aspect of deference and propitiation. It was painful to look at a friend who had thus conventionalised his countenance. Holl's own face brightened when another guest recalled Scanlon to his truer self. "You must have done some work to-day?" Miss Dow suggested.

"Took down the bed and put it in Nathan's room, and then he and I brought up Miles's table. Guess that was the worst of it, wasn't it, Nathan?"

"What did you do with all the pipes and bottles?" asked Miss Palmer. "Send 'em to the storage warehouse?" No, I don't want another

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potato, thank you; and you needn't be shy of telling us, on ma's account. My father used to smoke like a factory chimney, didn't he, ma?"

"Yes," the older woman sighed, "your pa learnt bad habits in the army."

Scanlon was plainly at a loss for words. He tried to cover his unreadiness by questioning other guests, in pantomime, concerning their desires. They wanted nothing; he was thrown back upon his own resources; and the girl ruthlessly returned to the attack:

"And what would you have done for dishes, if the Mileses hadn't happened to go away?" Miss Palmer demanded. "When I made the bet I didn't mean you should borrow so many things!"

"Well, why should I buy 'em?" Scanlon found courage to retort. "You ready to go to housekeepin'?"

She tossed her head. "That wasn't in the bet, either!" A comprehensive stare defied the party to prove that she was not her own mistress. Nobody took up the challenge; and then, as it happened, her fatal glance was turned upon the stranger. "All the same, this is quite a swell banquet, isn't it, Mr. Carter?" she said. "Are you going to put it in the *Ledger*?"

It was useless, Carter knew, to suggest that a

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newspaper man does not always drag his ball and chain. No one ever credits such an intimation; everybody resents it, as somehow showing disloyalty to the public interest. With an idea of extricating himself as easily as possible, "I'm afraid I have no power to put anything in the *Ledger*," Carter explained. "I'm not a regular member of the staff, you know. Just do a little special work, now and then, — and wait for something to turn up."

"Oh!" said the girl, blankly.

"Gee!" muttered Fairbanks, grinning sourly across the table. "I wish I could live without workin'!"

It was impossible to make the vigorous rejoinder that Carter felt the affront invited; and he had been so taken by surprise that he could not readily adjust his thoughts to milder words. As for the host, he scowled, but said nothing. It was Jenks who assumed the joyful duty of reproof. "Too bad your Union wouldn't elect you walking delegate, George," he murmured sympathisingly. "Why was it? — because you couldn't walk?"

The suggestion seemed effective: it reduced Fairbanks to red and angry silence. To Carter the punishment appeared almost disproportionate — the more so when Alfred stared and grinned

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and nudged the victim. Perhaps the same thought was in Miss Dow's mind, for she promptly changed the subject. "We're all going downstairs by and by, to see you wash the dishes," she told Scanlon.

He drew back in alarm. "Nit, not, no, not on your life!" he protested. "That wasn't in the contract. I've chartered Katie."

"Just hear him!" Miss Palmer exclaimed. "I believe he'd lost the bet if he hadn't been getting everybody to help him!"

"Well, say, did you expect me to roast the turk on the gas-jet, and go over in Franklin square to dig the potatoes?"

The girl evaded the question. "Don't you pass that plate to Alfred, ma!" she cried urgently. "Don't you, Floss! Let Mr. Scanlon get up and carry it around the table. We're company!"

"By the way, what was the bet?" Carter inquired.

"Theatre tickets against a green necktie, that he couldn't get up a satisfactory Thanksgiving dinner, here in his room. *You* ain't satisfied, are you, Alfred, dear?"

The boy looked at her gravely, and considered. "Oh, I guess I'm goin' to be," he replied at length. "Is there goin' to be any pie,

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Frank? 'Cause if there is I'll save some room for pie."

"Heaps of pie!" was the assurance. "There's a lot of the turkey yet," Scanlon added. "One more piece apiece, ladies? You're right, Mrs. Palmer, it is pretty good. In fact, the bird was a credit to his sex. Make a brace, boys, and let's finish him! Can't I help you again, Mr. Nichols?"

"Guess not — much obliged," said Nichols, sighing uncomfortably. "If I et any more I'd be ruptured — as the feller says."

Miss Palmer snickered at this; but it prompted Holl to glance from one to another, as though to invite the attention of each. "I s'pose," he suggested, manifestly saddened by the thought, "I s'pose there's lots of poor devils in Boston to-day without anything to eat!"

"Don't let it happen again, Nathan," Jenks responded. "And what about the poor devils without anything to drink?" Scanlon demanded. So frivolous a tone of comment was disheartening, and Holl ended where he began, and waited with resignation for what next might come. Nobody seemed anxious to talk. Persuaded then that the turkey had outlasted its usefulness, Scanlon called the girl and offered his guests a choice between squash pie and mince, tea and

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coffee. "But don't carry the gravy downstairs, Katie," he said. "Open the window and empty it over the hand-organ man. He's playin' 'Annie Rooney.'"

As Scanlon beamingly reinforced the feast with a box of candy, Fairbanks took heart to emerge from his spiritual seclusion. "Who wins the bet?" he asked, in a mild and chastened tone.

"Leave it to Mr. Carter," proposed Miss Dow.

"I should say Mr. Scanlon was entitled to the green necktie," Carter laughingly decided. "Does that suit you, Miss Palmer?"

"Me? Oh, I'm tickled to death! I'd given it to him, anyway. You'll say it's a beaut when you see it! That reminds me, Floss," she called across the table, "Miss Casey—Casey, the gum-chewer, you know—bought six of 'em, Miss McIntyre told me. Shouldn't you give up, to see one on that cross-eyed brother of hers?"

"Sh-h-h!" Mrs. Palmer warned her in an undertone. "Don't make fun of people for what they can't help!"

"I wasn't making fun of the eyes, ma; I was just thinking of the combination. Besides, we'll all go cross-eyed when Frank puts on that green tie!"

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"I hope there's an Irish harp on it," Scanlon declared gravely. "I'm a true patriot, if I was born on Lenox street. But say, Miss Palmer, you girls must go to the theatre, anyhow! Suppose you ask Mr. Carter to come along with us Monday night? and I'll touch the office for a pass for four."

"Mr. Carter, will you come along with me Monday night?"

"*Us*," Scanlon corrected. "I go with you, you know."

"How do you know but I'm tired of you? Well, then, Mr. Carter, will you come with Miss Dow and me? If he" — she nodded at Scanlon maliciously — "if he interferes with us, we'll have him arrested!"

"I'll be delighted to join the party, on any conditions," said Carter, smiling at each. He felt in the best of good humour with himself and all. He was quite unprepared for the disagreeable surprise that smote him when, chancing to look around, he encountered the intent and hostile gaze of Fairbanks; but, his conscience being clear, he met the challenge with boldness — not unmixed with wonder. For a moment it appeared that Fairbanks would speak, and Carter watched him, curious to learn the cause of his annoyance. Then Fairbanks ex-

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cused himself brusquely and walked over to the window, and turned his back.

"That was a bully dinner, Frank!" The words changed the current of Carter's irritated thought and he glanced gratefully towards Alfred, the speaker. "All the same," the boy added, "I bet I'm goin' to have a stomach-ache. I wish't you'd give me one o' your pictures — will you, Miss Dow?"

"One of my pictures?" the girl repeated in bewilderment. "What do you mean, Alfred?"

"George has got one. I saw it. He said when he was sick it made him feel better just to look at it and think about it. I've got a pain *now*," ended the boy, dismally.

"Mr. Fairbanks!" Miss Dow demanded, "do you hear what Alfred says?"

"Alfred lies!"

"What's that? Liar yourself, Fairbanks!" the boy's father broke in. "And a damn cur in the bargain — beggin' you ladies' pardon for the language! Alfud never told a lie in his life!"

"I don't know — what to say to you," Miss Dow went on unsteadily. Anger and pain and shame were in her voice. It almost seemed as though she spoke to herself, justifying herself, as well as to others. "I never gave the man any

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such thing! Did I ever give you a photograph, Mr. Fairbanks?"

"No."

"What's the odds, Floss?" Miss Palmer asked carelessly. "There are photos of me all the way from Rutland to Pawtucket, and I never lost any sleep over 'em yet!"

"Alfud! Quit your wigglin'!" Nichols interjected once more. "If you can't set still go in 'n' lay down. Course there may be some mistake about this thing," he volunteered as the boy writhed out of the room. "Alfud's as liable to make mistakes as anybody else. All is, if that feller calls my boy a liar again I'll break his face, as true as God!"

Evidently Mrs. Palmer thought it high time to go. "Come, girls!" she said in urgent, apprehensive tones. "Mr. Scanlon, we've had a nice dinner and" — she hesitated a moment, but went heroically on — "and a very pleasant time. Come, girls!"

"Hold on!" Fairbanks cried. He came forward a step and put out his hands pleadingly. "Miss Dow, you don't believe, do you, that I'd do anything to hurt your feelin's? Good heavens and earth! don't you know I wouldn't? You ain't goin' to turn against me, just because a kid makes some cheap talk! You can't! It ain't fair!"

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The girl looked at him coldly. "I haven't anything to say until I find out what right you have to put my photograph on exhibition — and where you stole it," she answered, at length.

Fairbanks stared at her retreating figure, as though unable to realise the fact of his curt dismissal. It was only the click of her own door-latch that, breaking the expectant silence, appeared to rouse him. He did not turn or speak, but started sombrely away.

Scanlon waited a moment, as though uncertain what might follow. Then he got up and closed the door.

" 'I dreamt I walked from Somerville
'Way up to Connemara hill,
The night I went to sleep in Bowdoin square,' "

Scanlon hummed. "What is all this? a pipe-dream, or a special session of the police-court, or only a holiday festival, with a big F?"

"See here, Scanlon, I'm sorry if I made any fuss," Nichols said apologetically. "Only I couldn't stand his" —

"You're all right, old sport!" Scanlon interrupted. "If you'd soaked Jimmy Whiskers I wouldn't said a word. But it was a fierce old feast, wasn't it? Have a cigar, boys, to soothe your nerves!"

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"That was funny of Alfred," Holl reflected aloud, as he struck a match. "Did he really think the picture would cure a stomach-ache, s'pose? Didn't he want to give Fairbanks a roast?"

"Oh, shucks, the boy didn't plan anything," Scanlon answered. "He's older'n his age, in some respects, — a kid that lives in a lodgin'-house is bound to be, — but in other ways he's innocent as any young one."

"Fairbanks is stuck on her, ain't he?" Nichols had the satisfied air of one who announces a discovery; and he seemed a little crestfallen when his suggestion was received as a matter of course. "Fairbanks might do worse," was his tame conclusion.

"She couldn't," Jenks growled emphatically.

"Well, I don't know about that," Scanlon argued. "She gets seven dollars a week, there at Merchant's; she can't save any money, and she hasn't any folks to give her a lift if she goes broke. As I figure it, two of these shop-girls, rooming together, can just about live on their wages. A girl might be safer if she had a husband — 'most any old thing — to fall back on, see?"

"Oh, well, Miss Dow wouldn't marry Fairbanks," Nichols affirmed confidently.

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"Of course she won't!" said Holl and Carter, in the same breath. Then they looked at each other and reddened. The coincidence was confounding in itself, and Jenks's cynical grin and Scanlon's chuckle did not tend to make it less so. Yet an inspiration visited Carter, as he glanced at Holl, blushing helplessly, and he put out his hand. "Shake on it!" he said.

"That's right," Scanlon commented. "If Fairbanks makes up his mind Miss Dow won't have him, a couple of friends, ready to back her up and scrap for her, may come in mighty handy. That the idea?"

"Yes," they answered him. But often, during the hour that followed, each caught the other's questioning eyes upon himself; each wondered what was in the other's mind.

V

IT was only for the hour, so far at least as Carter was concerned. By the time the night of the theatre party came around, and Scanlon — green necktie and all — appeared at his door, Holl might never have existed, almost, so slightly did he figure in Carter's thoughts. And there was nothing in Scanlon's conversation to revive an unpleasant or perplexing memory.

"It's a killer, ain't it?" Scanlon demanded, by way of introducing the tie, — and himself. "If Nichols sees it he'll throw a fit." He went over to the window and stared out at the fast-falling snow. "Guess the Lord was on our side, this time," he admitted. "I didn't want to take a pass for the Grand, — I like to shake the South End, once in a while, — but this is the kind of evenin' when it don't pay to go too far from headquarters."

Carter returned a brief but genial answer. In spite of the weather he had found it anything but a "blue Monday": he had turned off some good work; he had had none but pleasant encounters with his housemates. Indeed, the outburst of bitterness in Scanlon's room, four days earlier, seemed to have left no lasting consequences. Even Fairbanks contributed to the re-

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establishment of good feeling; he kept out of sight; and neither Miss Dow nor Carter nor Nichols took pains to urge any personal grievance. In and out of "business hours," therefore, the house had been very quiet. To-night, like all the city, it was under the deeper silence of the snow. Had it not been for sounds of preparation rising sometimes from the girls' room, Carter and Scanlon might have felt themselves wholly alone.

The night put a spell upon him who studied it. Not only did it foster a sense of alienation: it disabled him from realising that this soft, persistent, clinging cloud — material for dreams — was a force, and actively to be opposed. Scanlon started as though suddenly awakened when a sound louder than common penetrated the floor. His glance, as he turned to Carter, was both challenging and defensive. He spoke briskly, as though to prove that his attention had not wandered.

"I'll bet that makes seven hundred times they've opened and shut that drawer, in fifteen minutes," he said, wheeling from the window. "Women beat the devil, don't they? For a guess, what was she after, that time?"

"Second-best hat. She remembered it's snowing."

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"Well, she ought to remember there's no postponement on account of weather — and it's quarter of eight." He opened Carter's closet door, and thumped on the wall. "Alfred!" he cried. "Ho, Alfred!"

"Yes. I'm comin'." But the boy was slower than usual, and when he came he looked sleepy and careworn. "I was studyin' my jography lesson," he explained. "Boundin' Massachusetts."

"That's easy!" chuckled Scanlon. "She's bounded on the north by the Declaration of Independence, on the east by the Republic of Ireland, on the south by the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company, and on the west by Howard street. Ain't that right, Carter? Say, Alfred, fall downstairs, will you, and tell Miss Palmer it's twelve minutes of eight."

"Oh, ready, are they?" he repeated a moment later, as the boy's voice came up the stairway. "Talk about breakin' the record! They've busted it wide open! Where's your snow-shovels, girls?" was his demand, in the next breath.

"It ain't so very bad," Miss Palmer said indifferently. "We'd rather walk, Frank, — honest, we would. It's only three or four blocks, you know; and cars are more of a nuisance than a help, when everybody's drippy."

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"Have your own way, children. Carter and I'll be so much in." He marshalled the party to the sidewalk and offered his arm; but Miss Palmer refused with a tantalising gesture.

"Didn't I say I was tired of you?" she asked. "You take Floss. I'm going with Mr. Carter — I guess he'll let me. I know just what you'd talk about, and he'll tell me something I haven't heard before!"

If any such originality had been in Carter's power the sudden demand would have been sure to dispel it. He grinned half-heartedly, and mumbled something that may have been a compliment; but he felt tongue-tied and helpless. Had he known the girl better he would not have dreaded, as he did, the anguish of attempt and failure; she prattled gaily on, heedless of his dull responses, from the first moment. He did not realise that she asked nothing but a sympathetic hearer — not until she was deep in a description of the new dress that the weather had forbidden her to wear. Then, as his spirits rose with a mighty bound, at the assurance of safety —

"Miss Dow won't tell me what to-day's scrap was about!" Scanlon said suddenly, over his shoulder.

"What scrap?"

"Yours and hers."

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"Why, we didn't have any fuss — did we, Floss?" said Miss Palmer — as it seemed to Carter, somewhat consciously.

"N-no. Only" —

"Ah, ha! '*Only!*'" laughed Scanlon. "I knew it! Never were two women could live in the same house without scrappin' — not if one of 'em was the mother of Moses, the meekest woman!"

"Think you're smart, don't you?" Miss Palmer said, frowning. "Well, you ain't! You don't know anything about women!"

"That's right. Nobody does."

The girl looked at him angrily; but now he had turned his back again, so that she could not observe the effect of a retort; and she shrugged her shoulders, as though to throw off the whole matter. The sight of a telegraph messenger, ploughing sturdily across the street, suggested other words. "I always wanted to be a boy," she volunteered. "And if I had been, I'd been a messenger boy, like that."

"Why?"

"Because they go everywhere, and see everything. A woman can't. Why, I've lived in Boston four years, and I've never even been in Chinatown! And then, places like this" — they entered the theatre as she spoke — "I wish I

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could get on the inside, go behind the scenes, and look at people close to, like the messengers. If I wasn't afraid of getting arrested I'd borrow a suit of Scanlon's clothes, some time, and go around."

"You ought to be a reporter," the young man suggested. His laugh may have been inflected with disgust; his companion glanced at him keenly.

"Horrid, ain't I?" she said in an undertone. "Well, if you had to handle children's clothes, and talk to old tabby-cats, every day of your life, I guess you'd want to do somethin' lively.

"I can't understand what some people think women are made of!" The theatre was only sparsely filled — in the main with those invincible deadheads against whom no tempest can prevail; and, once settled in her seat, perceiving that few persons or none could overhear, Miss Palmer again took up her burden of complaint. "Just because we're women, we've got to act as though we were mummies, people think. I don't know why I shouldn't stand on the sidewalk and watch a dog-fight — if I want to. Do you? There are men down't the shop that, I'll bet you, crochet and do embroidery after they get home at night. Why is it any worse for me to take an interest in the things that real men do than it is

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for them to be sissies? Well, I won't bother you, now the curtain's up," she concluded briskly. "I know you want to look at that girl with the pink slippers."

This may or may not have been true; but Carter, who was almost too conservative to sympathise, and not quite clever enough to argue, willingly received it as an axiom, and turned towards the stage. The bill was a farce-comedy, a medley of song and dance, slang and horse-play. An Italian padrone and a German policeman opened it with a conversation about nothing in particular. Then a young woman with the legs of a Peri and the voice of a dissipated parrot displayed her physical glory and her vocal shame in a "specialty" seventeen minutes long. An older woman — she was supposed to be a French adventuress, and she wore black satin *décolleté*, as French adventuresses always do — practised her wink, her ankles, and her accent, upon the Irish hero, who promptly won favor by the original way in which he spat through his teeth. There was a "bicycle tramp" in the production, and there was also a reporter, both being the friends of a gay young man who followed the lucrative profession of son-in-law. Each of these people broke out in rollicking song on the slightest provocation. All their

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words and deeds enforced the joyous moral that to dance and drink, and dodge creditors, sums up the whole duty of man.

As the curtain fell on the first of the three acts Scanlon leaned across Miss Dow to speak to Carter.

"I generally manage to go two hours without my rum," he said; "but I feel to-night as though I'd like to sneak out and buy a clove. What do you say? I guess the girls will excuse us, if we promise never to do it again.

"I thought I'd get 'em some candy," he explained as they stopped in the lobby to light cigarettes. "If the show turns queer it'll help 'em to forget their misery." So when they had drunk a temperate glass of beer they sped to the nearest confectioner's. It was just before they gave their return-checks to the doorkeeper that Scanlon, not without embarrassment, made a more important suggestion, which Carter was equally ready to adopt.

"If it's all the same to you, let's you and I swap seats," Scanlon ventured. "Miss Palmer's freakish, you see, but perhaps I could make some play, if I was next to her." Then as Carter nodded and smiled, Scanlon added dolefully: "She's liable to get off her trolley, I've always noticed, when the old hen's around. I

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swear I don't know why; I wouldn't do the girl any harm. I s'pose her mother's all the time worryin' her to take up with some Willy-boy that sky-pilots a Sunday-school class; but she never would, not if the Mrs. talked diamonds and pearls. She's a dead game sport. That's why I like her."

"Oh, you're all right," Carter assured him as they started down the aisle; and Scanlon was grateful. Yet events, at first, seemed to disprove the prophecy; for when Scanlon moved to the seat his friend had formerly occupied, Miss Palmer looked at Carter reproachfully. "I didn't ask you to bring me this," she said.

"Don't the green necktie cut any ice at all?" Scanlon demanded with bravery. "You ain't even noticed that I had it on."

"Where's the brogue that goes with it?" was the relentless answer. But at this point a truce was tacitly proclaimed, and Carter felt free to devote himself, as he gladly did, to the girl beside him. It was distinctly pleasing to think that she enjoyed his companionship. He told himself proudly that, now that her face was a little flushed and her deep-grey eyes alight, she was the prettiest girl in the house. He compared with her the other girl, who, he foresaw, would mature into the blowsy stoutness that one

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finds in its extreme on Salem street. He wondered why Scanlon or any man should prefer the forward, full-blooded type, which he assured himself (for being a youth of limited experience he could afford to dogmatise) never suggests either intellect or breeding. He was busily enumerating the perfections of the more quiet and clinging type — Miss Dow's — when Miss Dow herself diverted his attention.

"Are there really reporters like that?" she whispered.

Carter looked at the frisky youngster with the overgrown note-book, and considered.

"There are all kinds of reporters," he said at length. "Stage reporters are one kind. I'll tell you about the others, if you'll let me call, some night."

"Why, of course," she answered. "You know I'm always there."

The "bicycle tramp" had just begun his "trick and fancy bicycle-riding," but Carter looked upon it with eyes that saw not. That the form of Miss Dow's rejoinder was not more cordial did not distress him. That she seemed to wonder why he sought the invitation was a thing that made him wonder. Perhaps she thought he should take his welcome for granted. Moreover, he queried, all at once, whether she would meet

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him in the parlour or expect him to go to her room. He knew that the ethics of the lodging-house permit a woman to receive callers in her own apartment, but he did not feel quite sure that Miss Dow availed herself of the latitude which is so charitably given to innocent girls—and others. He shrunk from making experiment; and if he questioned her on this point he feared she would, according as her practice was free or rigorous, think him “finical” or over-bold. Danger every way! And the young man enshrouded himself in conjecture and heaped unnecessary mountains out of superfluous mole-hills—until Miss Dow’s laugh advised him that he alone was meditating solemnities.

The “bicycle tramp” had achieved an elaborate fall, and the fortunate people with nothing on their minds were enjoying it. Carter smiled benignantly at his ecstatic friends, and when the actor suddenly discovered that he could ride, and entered upon delicate feats, the young man consented to forego his superiority and join the applause. Then it was easy to be interested in the adventuress’s singing of “Won’t You Come and Play with Me?” and in an “acrobatic dance” by two fluffy-haired maidens with a talent for turning handsprings. Carter thought he paid them all due tribute; he felt that he suffered undeserved

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reproach when Miss Palmer hastened to criticise, the moment that the curtain fell. "You look as glum as a Quaker funeral," she said.

"But I feel as gay as a Paris can-can," he had the presence of mind to answer. "Miss Dow has been good to me."

"Wasn't I?"

"Oh, yes! You both belong in the Saints' Calendar. I'm not drawing comparisons between you."

"No? Did Frank?"

It seemed to Carter that, considering it came from a "chum," this artful inquiry must prove peculiarly maddening. He drew back smilelessly, leaving it unanswered. Anxious to give Miss Dow other matter for thought, he uttered the first words that came to him. "Were you ever in Chinatown?" he asked her.

"Why, no!"

"Would you like to go down there and look around some night?"

"I — can't tell." The girl's bewilderment was so acute as to be almost pathetic. "How did you happen to speak of it?"

"Well, I" — Then he hesitated. Just at this moment he did not deem it wise to credit any inspiration to Miss Palmer. "Oh, I don't know," he went on desperately. "Where *do* thoughts

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come from? It's interesting to see the Chinese at home, and it's quite an experience to eat chop-suey, and—and— We'll talk about it later. I wouldn't suggest your going, if it wasn't all right, you know."

"I know that," she answered quietly. The tone of the utterance made him proud. "You mustn't ask me to promise, though, just now. I'm afraid I'm an awful coward about things that I'm not used to."

"You'll never make me believe you're not a brave woman. You haven't put up your hand to see if your back hair is all right since we came in."

"But that doesn't prove I'm brave," was the gay reply. "It only shows I'm not conceited or nervous. What would be the sense in worrying about my hair, anyhow? I know it can't fall off."

"Oh, yes, that's true. It's a great thing to be young, isn't it? Fancy me sitting here again, forty years from to-night. You'll be a dignified matron then, crowned with white hair, — the kind that doesn't fall off, I hope, — just as attractive at sixty as you are at twenty, only in a different way. But I'll be bald and spectacled and toothless. Probably I shall have the rheumatism when I get home that night; and while I rub

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my shins in front of the fire I shall think of the other evening, forty years before, and wonder why I didn't stand on my seat, after every act, and publicly thank God for my youth and my — good company ! ”

“ Oh, but you'll be famous by that time,” Miss Dow said confidently, “ and nobody'll ever think of your age. Can you imagine Shakespeare as an old man ? ”

“ Shakespeare ! ” A bolder youth must have revolted at the presumptuous parallel. But before Carter could make a full disclaimer Scanlon interrupted with a question ; then Miss Palmer and Miss Dow exchanged a few words ; and thus the incident was definitely closed. Yet it is inspiring to be believed in, though ever so unwisely ; and Carter emerged from the overwhelming flattery with a lighter heart and a more courageous tongue. “ I wish you'd let me tell you how well you're looking to-night,” he murmured.

“ Are you a poet, too ? ” Her whimsically expectant glance and utterance — her manner of evading his compliment by seeming to question its sufficiency — was so far beyond the reach of any conversational art he commanded that, in answer to the challenge, Carter could only look admiration. At any rate, he had

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given her pleasure. Braced by that assurance, he was able to endure another forty minutes of actors who conceived the sense of humour a thing to be assailed with clubs; and he even summoned a laugh for those other performers, fewer in number, who operated more subtly, after the merciful manner of a corkscrew. If patience faltered — why, he had only to close his ears and cast his eyes upon the girl at his side. Sight of her was wholly satisfying; and if he chose to call it forth the music of her voice would carry him, he knew, far from this garish place, away from the noisy tricksters who made a jest of all the heights and depths of human life. A grand and sacred thing was life, he told himself resentfully. And now for the first time a truth he would have calmly conceded on the basis of the general experience became to him a fact personally apprehended — that love of woman rounds and perfects life. He did not definitely ascribe to his companion this broadening of his horizon; the desire of possession had hardly begun to stir in him. Yet he knew that in some dim, mysterious way he had been influenced to larger thoughts. His face must have expressed it. Miss Palmer looked at him curiously, once and again, as they prepared to leave the theatre.

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"What have you done to him, Floss?" she asked. "He looks as though he wanted to lead a Salvation Army meetin'. Or was it the show that made you feel so fine, Mr. Carter? 'Twas pretty good, wasn't it? What's that, Frank?" and Carter was truly grateful that she had so promptly found another target. "Supper? No, thank you — not unless Floss cares for it. You see we'd get our skirts wet, such a night as this, if we only crossed the street, and it would be more than the supper was worth, to sit an hour with them flopping around our feet. I think we'd better get right home. Wow!" she shivered, as they came out into the street, "this *is* a snow-storm!"

To shield Miss Dow with his umbrella, and to hold her in the narrow footpath that twisted along the sidewalk, took most of Carter's strength. She appreciated his difficulties and did not impose the additional burden of talk; though she laughed, at intervals, when fragments of her room-mate's persistent chatter were hurled at them by wind-flaws. Perhaps the sympathetic smiles exchanged at the street-corners, under the blink of flickering lamps, had a high conversational value. It is certain that the walk did not lessen, but rather intensified, Carter's sense of exaltation. He was sorry when

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he reached the house — the more so because, under Miss Palmer's watchful eye, he could neither prolong his good-night nor make it so cordial as to intimate his feeling. Therefore, he cut the ceremony short and went, somewhat glumly, to his own room.

He lighted a fire in his toy stove, and, with the elaborate carefulness of a man who has known what it is to want a decent suit, spread his coat and trousers over chair-backs to dry. Then he turned up the gas and pulled his table under the jet. He felt that he was in the proper frame of mind to write — a poem, perhaps; and he had had experience enough to know that the best assurance of "inspiration" is to propose a task and set about it. Yet ideas and words are not always fellow-travellers: his floating fancies declined to cast anchor. And while he gnawed his pencil and thought hard, there was a knock at the door. "Come in!" he called crossly. Holl entered.

"Oh, I didn't know you's busy. Just loafin' around a minute, before I went to bed, and saw the light under your door. But I don't want to disturb you," Holl said. In spite of the disclaimer he seemed more than willing to stay awhile, and Carter took his trousers off a chair and pushed it forward. "Tough night, ain't it?" Holl suggested.

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"Pretty wild storm."

"Have a good time at the show?"

"Oh, fair."

Holl fidgeted in his seat and looked, Carter thought, surprised and reproachful. "A man ought to enjoy himself with Miss Dow to talk to," he said. "She's pretty as a picture, and good, clear through. Smart, too; I hear she used to teach school down East before she come to Boston."

"Yes?" answered Carter, apathetically.

"Yes. I don't blame Fairbanks for wantin' to marry her. I don't know, though, whether he or any other labourin' man has a right to marry a girl that ought to have nice things around her, and might, if she was left alone, get somebody that could provide 'em. Of course it's a point that every man has got to decide for himself. I ain't undertakin' to say what Fairbanks's duty is. As far as I'm concerned, I've made up my mind I wouldn't be justified in marryin' anybody."

"Why? How's that?"

"Why, I don't average more'n twelve dollars a week. That ain't enough for two. Then of course a wage-worker's liable to lose his job any time. I ain't much afraid but I could always get somethin' to eat and a place to sleep, but it would drive me wild to think that a woman and

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—and children dependin' on me might have to go hungry! The day's comin' when a man that's willin' to work won't have to take chances on the misery of them he loves, but it ain't here yet! It ain't here yet!"

"Suppose a woman was ready to share the risk? I'm poor enough, God knows, but if I was in love I don't believe I'd take the thing as seriously as you do."

"Oh, well, you're an educated man," Holl argued. "Even if an educated man belongs to the proletariat, he has opportunities us ignorant ones don't have, chances we couldn't even see. No tellin' but you'll be rich before you die. I never shall be. It don't make me bitter or discouraged, — you mustn't think that of me, — but it just opens my eyes to some of the things I must do and mustn't do. Considerin' your prospects, you'd have a right to get married tomorrow. But me! Why, here, I can bring it right home to us: If I loved a girl, and I thought you might take a likin' to her, it would be my duty to keep out of the way. I would, too."

This was interesting; yet it did not touch Carter so closely but that he could wonder and smile at Holl's deadly earnestness. "You wouldn't talk this way at a Socialist meeting," he commented in a rallying tone.

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The fire died out of Holl's eyes. He sunk into an attitude of dejection. "I wouldn't need to," he said listlessly. "It ain't so much a question of general principle, perhaps, as it is of personal duty. You mustn't think, though," with a mirthless laugh, "that I'm tryin' to advertise myself for a saint. It would hurt me to give up the girl I wanted, just as much as it would any other man."

"Yes, I suppose so," Carter agreed. In a general way, Holl's proposition impressed and entertained him; but not until Holl had gone soberly away did he perceive the literary value of it. Then he began to make notes. Presently he found himself embroidering them with fanciful portraits of the woman and the two men who might play parts in such a drama of renunciation. The task grew upon him. His fire had gone out and his room was chill, when he took up the hastily-written sheets, almost a story as they stood, for a last reading. As, aglow with satisfaction, he laid them down again, there suddenly came to him — like a breath of the blast that pelted the snow against his windows — a dampening recollection of the talk at the Thanksgiving dinner. He reviewed it, word by word, while he undressed.

"I wonder," he muttered, "I wonder if the

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fellow meant to notify me that he wouldn't make love to Florence—Miss Dow—if I wanted her? Confound his impudence! But no! It isn't possible!"

VI

THOUGH pride forbade the admission that Holl's discourse might have a personal bearing, it remained, nevertheless, a thing to be remembered. The thought of it made Carter uneasy. In his low-spirited moments it challenged his intentions; more than that, it seemed to insinuate a doubt of his superior charm. That he might less frequently recall it, he avoided Holl. That Holl might find no provocation for a second preachment (though not even to himself would Carter own that such was his motive), he resolved to shun Miss Dow also. This was comparatively easy when, quite unexpectedly, he became the literary adviser to the manufacturers of Vitalline.

Connoisseurs of diseases will recall the earlier triumphs won by this famous medicine: how it vanquished croup, whooping-cough, diabetes, rheumatism, cancer, and consumption, in one short month, and seemed almost to threaten the permanence of death and sin. It had its beginning in the suburban town of Exmouth, with two enterprising young men who "ran" an apothecary store. Exmouth is a no-license town, this is a censorious world, and their soda-fountain fell under deep suspicion. They were willing to re-

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turn good for evil, however, provided it could be done without actual loss; and having, as it chanced, two or three barrels of whiskey in the cellar, they hastened to add thereto some water, sugar, wormwood, and sassafras, and decant the compound into pint bottles. These they sold at a dollar apiece. The name alone — Vitalline — was, they thought, worth that much to any despondent sufferer. Their invalid neighbours promptly agreed. And since Vitalline yielded a reasonable profit of about eleven hundred per cent., Messrs. Murdoch & Gibbs felt that they would be justified in bringing its merits to the notice of the distressed and fatigued everywhere. To serve this purpose was Carter's honourable function.

The plan of the manufacturers was to "circularise" one town at a time; to supply every druggist in that town with Vitalline and then to make sure that every citizen should hear about it. "Why 'Vitalline'?" a twelve-page pamphlet, was Carter's first achievement. Herein he explained the origin of life, demonstrated the germ theory of disease, and showed, by diagrams, how Vitalline annihilated the germs and gave free course to healthful existence — wherefore its name. Though the medical associations did not recognize this profound and radical

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treatise, the medicine-buyers did. Presently Messrs. Murdoch & Gibbs began to receive photographs (with and without chin-whiskers) of grateful, ungrammatical persons who had been snatched from the grave by this epoch-marking medicine. The time was ripe for advertising in the newspapers, and the money was ready. It was then Carter devised that telling catch-line, "Liquid Life," with which the patrons of the press have since grown so familiar. First used in Maine, where Vitalline quickly became popular, it found its way, almost at once, across the continent. This it was that caught the eye of the chief of police of Kokonomis, Oregon, and led him to try Vitalline after he had been "given up to die" of a complication of maladies. He took fourteen bottles and was cured; and his was not the only precious life saved (*vide* testimonials) through the influence of this inspired phrase, which, incidentally, promoted an advance in Carter's salary.

From the first his work gave satisfaction; and though the remuneration, then, was almost nominal, it at least enabled him to live without drawing upon his slender savings. In some respects the experience was worth more than money. He was very much "on the inside" with his employers; he traced the remotest con-

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volutions of those acute methods that enable some men to get rich — and keep out of the penitentiary. His style, which perhaps had been too inexplicit and allusive, was chastened and invigorated by the obligation to write so that a reader *must* heed; he profited daily by the criticisms of those who were able to put themselves in the place of the public and tell which of two phrases would be the more likely to harvest a dollar. He had entered with no misgivings upon this alien avocation, for he knew that in itself "hack-work," provided it stops short of monopolizing a writer's time or sapping his strength, need never harm a man. It did not surprise him, therefore, that his ambition and his ideals remained intact. The danger that really did threaten, from his environment, he failed to recognise. Long afterwards he perceived that, whilst devising lies to swindle fools, one loses touch with honest-hearted intelligence; and that is a slow and painful process by which a writer unlearns the trick of cajolery and replaces himself on the solid ground of human sympathy.

As yet, however, while the penitential days were in the future, he found a fascination in crime. He took the cars for Exmouth every morning with high anticipations — seldom dis-

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appointed — of entertainment and instruction. After his pamphlet began to reach its audience the scope of his duties broadened to embrace the confidences of persons who, having detailed their symptoms, inquired whether Vitalline would help; and there were always letters, still more delightful, from people who had been healed of mortal ills by Messrs. Murdoch & Gibbs's glorified whiskey-and-water. To suggest or dictate suitable replies to such epistles was as important as to concoct "ads." for newspapers — and vastly more interesting. Generally he finished his tasks by luncheon-time, and returned to the city feeling refreshed, rather than wearied, by a commerce with amusing idiots which demanded the exercise of no mental gift besides ingenuity.

For a fortnight following the theatre party he made chary use of the privileges he paid for at Miles's; and even after the effect of Holl's deliverance had somewhat worn off he clung pretty closely to his room, when in the house, and so timed his comings and goings that he should miss embarrassing encounters. To compensate himself for giving up Miss Dow's society he began to study her sex — or thus, at least, the fact was registered in that subconsciousness which lies below acknowledged

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thought, even. The truth was that contact with this girl had somehow awakened a sex perception which had never before obtruded itself to shape his life. His had been a lonely childhood, and a reticent, though active, youth. Temperament had withheld him, later, from the gross outbreaks that some of the boys in Newspaper row occasionally indulged in; and if he did not disdain the finer-natured woman equally with the prostitute it was mainly because he was equally indifferent to both. He could conceive angels as feminine — for the purposes of fiction he had frequently done so — and he knew that there were girls who were “good fellows,” who pulled a scientific oar, and would not faint at sight of a shot-gun; but that an angel might come down to earth and perch upon one’s knee, that a good fellow might prove kissable as well as comradely, or that *he* might care to offer his own knee and his own lips to them or any of their sisters, — these were possibilities that had never cost him an hour’s concern.

He had always been shy with women: sometimes defensive instinct thus displays itself in the uncontaminated male of the species; but now that he began to give heed to them he began to grow bolder. Every inquisition revealed charms, hitherto unsuspected, that

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strengthened him to continue the pursuit. It was with something of the feeling of a discoverer that he would glance along the side of a street-car. Each in her degree, the little school-girl, the maiden, the young woman in bloom, the mature matron, and the Mother in Israel, would, he knew, yield him some delight, some perfection of feature, or figure, or expression, for the rejoicing of his soul. His was not so much the eye of the sensualist — yet — as it was that of the beauty-lover to whom a roseate world has just been opened; and surely ardent feeling is not out of place in the presence of masterpieces God has created!

It was inevitable that, being addicted to the unprofitable habit of self-analysis, he should try, sooner or later, to dissect this new passion of his. With a view of testing its innocence he even visited one of the cheap theatres that, Jenks had told him, Fairbanks sometimes patronized; and stared for two hours at the raddled sluts in tights. He felt some curiosity, an occasional stir of desire, and at intervals a thrill of æsthetic pleasure; but his dominant emotion was one that mingled pity and disgust. Poor devils! he thought; and again as he looked at the auditors, all hag-ridden with lubricity, poor devils! The experience heightened his sense

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of safety, and, for the time, it confirmed his tendency to smug Philistinism. The one thing withholding him from self-satisfaction was an uneasy consciousness that Holl had been able to influence him — him ! — and that this seemed to prove Holl the wiser and stronger man. He wondered sometimes whether Holl was a leader among his own people. To settle that question, Carter finally went, one Sunday night, to one of the public meetings regularly held by the Equity Alliance.

Leaving Holl's activities out of question, Carter thought he knew what he might expect to see and hear. Like every other newspaper man, he was familiar with Poverty. He had surveyed it in most of its phases, from the rapid and violent disintegration of a drunkard's family to that gradual atrophy which carries off gentle maiden ladies who keep rooms in a respectable neighbourhood by dint of avoiding butchers' bills. Moreover, he had studied the specifics for Poverty, and their promoters: the temperance pledge and the savings-bank book in the hands of the passionless Pharisee; the Gospel according to Karl Marx as expounded by the Sunday Socialist on the Common; and the amiable but somewhat arid oratory of the Philanthropist who can afford to "visit" for the Associated

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Charities because his agent promptly ejects non-paying tenants. All these people were interesting, but none of them had ever impressed him as quite convincing. Holl was — different. Admitting, merely for the sake of argument, that he was able to move his fellows, it might be worth while to know in what spirit he worked, and whence he derived his motive force.

At first glance there was no promise of inspiration in the Equity Alliance for him or any other. Carter found this Socialist society in the "Cove," at the top of a pretentious brick building which, like most fair-seeming structures in a tenement district, was shabby enough within. Two or three hundred persons, straitened in comfortless benches, filled a long, low, narrow room on the fourth floor. A mighty stove and many gas-jets hurled a poisonous heat against the nostrils. A Babel-like murmur of Yiddish, German, Russian, Swedish, Italian, and English assailed the ear. But race prejudices played no part in this confusion — it was the harmonious jabber of good-fellowship. And these of the Equity Alliance were a simple and a friendly folk. Carter felt himself welcomed by many nods and glances, and he surveyed the scene like one who is at home. Besides the red flag draped behind a little platform, and a few por-

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traits of famous revolutionists that hung upon the walls, nothing was there to divert eye or mind from the human comedy.

The meeting was opened after the simplest possible fashion by a stocky young man with an unsentimental chin, who talked in the accurate, assured manner of a scholar. He was a cigar-maker, somebody said. According to the same authority, the speaker of the evening — his subject was "The Effect of Machinery on Labour" — was a Haverhill shoemaker. It was certain that he had the statistics of the craft at his tongue's end, and he backed the figures with a rough-and-ready eloquence that, applied to conditions rather than to theories, seldom failed to arouse his hearers. It was to these that Carter chiefly gave heed. There were alert faces, refined faces, sweet and sympathetic faces, in this cosmopolitan gathering, and there were prosperous-looking men to join the applause that hailed the new evangel. But others — and such perhaps were the majority — wore the deadly pallor of the sweat-shop or showed the seamed and knotted hands that speak of rigorous toil. Their very attitudes told the whole pathetic story of the ignorant poor. The orator used the plain language of the people, but even so they groped for his meaning. Centuries of spirit-crushing oppres-

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sion were back of these men and women ; in the present, handicapped by inheritance and by environment as well, ill clad, ill housed, ill fed, restrained from gainful occupations by the barrier of an alien language, — what could life mean to them ?

Their eyes brightened, they held themselves straighter, as the speaker rhapsodized of justice, fraternity, and better times to come. Would one do wrong, Carter wondered, who helped them thus to beguile with dreams their toilsome days ? Say that one knew the promise of Socialism to be only a promise, impossible of fulfilment as a poet's fantasy, — so long as it lightened the burden of life for these unfortunates, would it not be righteously kind to put it before them ? He waived the decision when the thought struck him that on the part of Holl, at least, there was no make-believe. Impossible to doubt that in all honesty he had taken up the cross of this crusade ! Involuntarily Carter looked around to gain confirmation from the frank and earnest eyes ; but Holl was nowhere visible. Then the thought of personal rivalry faded away. These dwarfed existences began to appeal for pity. He almost wished he too might be a believer and a helper.

As he reached after a handkerchief — for the

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room was at the point where perspiration boils — his hand encountered a manuscript. He knew what it was — the “copy” for a new Vitalline circular — and the recollection of its evasions and sophistries traversed his mood like a lightning-stroke. If he were a Socialist, now, consistency would forbid him thus to deceive the people. Then the speaker mockingly quoted a verse of a hymn, and Carter caught a word that rounded out his thought — neither could one do such things if one were a Christian! He smiled to himself at this unexpected concurrence of economics and theology. For a moment he questioned what the point of agreement might be. Unselfishness, he decided. Was *he* prepared to make any vital sacrifice for any human being?

He rose on a sudden impulse, and went thoughtfully out of the hall, as though to pursue — or evade — the problem that, soon or late, presses at the door of every soul. He had always prided himself on dignifying his art; but now it occurred to him that he gained leisure to practise realism by devoting half his time to the manufacture of lies. And suppose the lying harmed nobody else, — simply stultified himself, — would he be strong enough to give up, for his own sake, the creature comforts it brought him, and trust

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the verdict of time upon the work in which he thought he believed? Was he ready for anything more than a partial and qualified adherence to truth? Nay, did there not lurk at the back of his mind a feeling that by the way of realism a novelist was most certain to arrive at wealth and fame? If that were so, then there was a taint upon the convictions which he had cherished as most sacred!

He stood still for a moment and gazed up the moonlit vista of Harrison avenue as though considering a choice of roads. Then he damned himself for an impractical ass, and swung forward again. Why should a man be scrupulous, above his fellows? In the reaction he suddenly remembered with biting distaste some concessions made in the past to conscience, by which he had lost money or forfeited pleasure. He wished those opportunities could come back: he would enjoy his chance and have his fling, like other men.

A girl darted out of a doorway and laid her hand on his arm. "Good evening," she said.

Carter stopped his stride and looked down at her. Somehow she seemed to typify the good times he had given up — she, the poor little waif of the street. He put his gloved hand under her chin and, lifting her face, stared at her with

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brutal intentness. She shivered a little and turned away her eyes.

"It — it's cold here," she suggested. "Don't you want to go home with me?"

Carter laughed harshly. "Hell, yes! Why not?" he said. "Come on!" They went along together.

VII

AS the blackness of the winter night began to melt into morning grey Carter let himself in at Miles's door. He had fumbled unfamiliarly for the keyhole; he lifted a blank and heavy eye to the stairway. The place produced that curious effect of strangeness which sometimes, after an uncommon experience, pertains to common things. He slowly groped his way to the second floor. When he turned at the landing it did not greatly surprise him that the gas-jet on the opposite wall should flare up suddenly, or that Miss Dow — with hair disordered and a flung-on appearance as to dress — should appear before him. This was all a part of the strangeness. He looked at the girl without speaking. She gave a gasp of thankfulness.

"Oh, is it you, Mr. Carter?" she said. "I just came out to get somebody to go for the doctor. Miss Palmer's taken sick."

Carter shook himself together. "Any particular doctor?" he asked.

"No, the nearest. There's one three doors above. She's suffering terribly. I think it's pneumonia."

The doctor three doors above — a middle-aged man with the settled sardonic expression

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of one who has proved that lodgers are a migratory race — heard without enthusiasm of his new patient, but dressed and made ready with that unhurried speed which physicians use. Carter waited for him, and led the way to the girls' room. Miss Dow opened the door; and Carter noted, as a fact illuminative of her sex, that even in this brief and crowded interval she had found time to don a house-jacket and knot her hair. He meditated this, cherishing a sense of the superiority of man, while he lingered to ask the doctor about the sick girl. Yet it was Miss Dow herself who first emerged from the room, coming confidently forward as though she knew she would find him.

"It *is* pneumonia," she announced. "I put on a mustard plaster, and the doctor says about all there is to do is to keep renewing it. She's easier, and he says as long as she's well taken care of he doesn't think there's much danger. Of course her mother will see to that." The tone suggested that, though willing to admit her comparative incapacity, she had been reminded of it more ruthlessly than seemed quite necessary. Had it not been for the words that followed he might have supposed her appealing for personal sympathy. "I thought I'd come out and tell you, since you were so kind to go," she

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added coldly enough, "though I don't suppose you care what happens to any of us."

"I'm sorry," Carter answered deprecatingly. He understood that her words implied reproach for his neglect; and he could not resent it. Here in her presence a conviction of ill-deserving folly, as well as discourtesy, had suddenly humbled him. It restrained his speech, even though admiration — a coarser sentiment, now, than it had been — revived while he looked at her. "The fact is," he stammered, "I — I've been trying to get a new scheme under way. It took all the brains I had, and more time than there was. I'll be sorry I ever went into it, though, if it makes me lose my friends."

"You don't have to work all night, do you?" she asked in simple wonder.

Carter reddened. "Well, no — that is, not very often." He hastened to change the subject. "Isn't there something I can do for Miss Palmer — or you?" he inquired. Then, as she shook her head, "Suppose I knock at your door, to see if you have any errands, when I go out at eight o'clock?"

"No, I'd rather you wouldn't," Miss Dow said decisively. "She's been awake 'most all night, and she might get a nap. We won't need to bother you, anyway. Alfred doesn't have to go to

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school, you know, since it's Christmas week, and he's always a good boy about going anywhere."

Carter inferred that *he* was a bad boy. At any rate he owned himself rightfully punished, and he went submissively upstairs. Just at present a snub was not so acute an infliction as it might have been at another time; for though his nerves were riotous his mental processes seemed to share the limpness of his muscles. Formless and disconnected impressions, scarcely to be dignified as thoughts, entered his mind and slipped away again as he bunglingly undressed. One of his shoes, half-laced, gaped open at the top; he held it and stared at it for several minutes; until he remembered that the lace had knotted and, sooner than wait a second to disentangle it, he had cut it apart. Was that last night—or when? There was a stain on his waistcoat, and he deliberated over it in the same dull, befogged fashion. That was beer. The girl had had some in her room, and they drank out of the bottles. He could taste it yet, warm, flat, nauseous. And her name was Josie Williams. There were Williamses in Bath. He caught himself calling the roll of this highly respectable family. Then that curious throbbing at the base of the brain, and the prickling in his arms and legs, forced his attention. He knew the sensations well enough:

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they sometimes followed protracted mental exertion. He chuckled once or twice at the idea of Josie Williams engaging his intellect. It might be a good scheme to put in ten minutes of hard work with the dumb-bells. But no — they looked too heavy. He took the bottle of brandy he kept for his guests, and poured himself a double dose. When he drowsed into stertorous slumber his stifled consciousness was labouriously framing a fear that daylight would come too soon.

It did. His door opened and closed, and he sat up in bed — an evil savour in his mouth, his eyes glued together with viscid rheum, and stiff and sore in every limb as though he had been beaten. It was nine o'clock. Evidently Katie had taken it for granted that he had gone out as usual, and had come to "do up" his room. He resisted a temptation to lock the door and stay in bed; before he went to his sponge-bath, however, he again applied himself (sparingly, this time) to the brandy, and decided that the stimulant did him good. He dressed with many yawns and groans, yet the effort braced him, — even for that interview with his landlady which civility seemed to necessitate. But Mrs. Miles was a woman of experience, and her manner was neither severe nor embarrassed.

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"I hope you'll excuse me for breakin' in on you, Mr. Carter," she began. "I started to open the beds while Katie's washin', and I thought all the lodgers was out. But ain't Monday the worst mornin' in the week, to wake up? I tell Miles I could get up easy at four o'clock Sunday mornin', when I don't have to, but Monday mornin' I always want to sleep."

"Everybody does," Carter answered lightly. His very relief at the absence of any personal suggestion may have made his voice sound indifferent, or heartless, when he fulfilled the purpose of his call by asking, "And how's Miss Palmer to-day?" for Mrs. Miles looked at him somewhat sternly as she responded, "She's pretty sick."

"Oh, that's a pity!"

"Yes, it is." The landlady's face cleared, and she moved a step nearer. "But I'm so thankful" — she spoke as one imparting a confidence — "that it ain't anything catchin'! Now, Alfred" — she paused to stand on tiptoe and straighten one of the globes on the chandelier — "I think as much of that boy as though he was my own young one, but I almost hate to have him here, dreadin' all the time that he'll take somethin' at school. Many's the night I've waked up in a

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cold sweat from dreamin' there was a scarlet-fever card tacked on the front door."

"Well, I suppose such things have to happen," suggested Carter, helplessly aware that the words were both ineffective and unwelcome.

"Yes, but in a lodgin'-house!" Apparently the landlady felt that a Deity disposed to be fair-minded would hold such institutions exempt. "Sickness is terrible, anyhow," she sighed; "and I don't know what kind of a woman Mis' Palmer is goin' to turn out to be. She could bother me to death, if she was one o' that kind. It's always a risk, lettin' women into a house like this. If they're young women you don't know's they're straight, and if they're older, and nothin' to do but sit around, why, they're eternally pokin' their noses into other people's business. Now, Mis' Palmer — Would you mind reachin' me down that vase, Mr. Carter?" she interjected suddenly. "You're taller'n I am, and I don't like to stand on these parlour chairs. Thank you." From somewhere beneath her apron she extracted a rag, and wiped the ornament industriously. "It was only last Friday that Katie pretended to dust this room," she commented. "I s'pose she did it — did it as thorough as comes natural to any girl with her eye on the clock and her mind on the feller she's goin' to

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meet at half-past seven. *I* don't know where the dirt comes from — What was I talkin' about? Oh, Mis' Palmer. Well, last winter, she kept herself *to* herself, I'll say that for her, but she thinks the sun rises and sets in Nettie, and of course she'll be fussy about her. I hope to goodness we'll all make allowances and try to be patient if she gets cranky — that's what I hope."

"You must let me know if there's anything I can do for them," Carter volunteered.

"Yes, I will. And I tell you, Mr. Carter, I ain't so sure but Miss Dow'll need some lookin' after. Mis' Palmer's kind o' jealous-minded, I'm afraid, she won't want anybody but herself to do any nursin', and, seein' 's the girls have chummed together, Miss Dow can't help feelin' it — There's one o' your coat-buttons loose, Mr. Carter; hadn't you better let me just get a needle and thread and sew it on? It worries me to see anything flappin' like that. And so," she resumed, while she deftly fastened the button, "if you can do anything to make it pleasant for her, and I know you can, I wish't you would. She's a girl that don't make friends with everybody, and I don't s'pose she's much acquainted in Boston, so she's liable to be kind o' lonesome. To-night and to-morrow night she'll be workin' late at the

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store, but day after to-morrow's Christmas Day, and of course after Christmas she'll have her evenin's, same as ever, and if you'd go and talk to her once in a while it would kind of take up her mind."

"Why — certainly," Carter answered a little doubtfully. "I'd be delighted to do anything that seemed likely to give her pleasure," he explained.

"She'll be pleased, all right," affirmed the landlady. "And so'll I. I tell Miles he and I must seem old folks to a girl like her, and we ain't spry enough, anyhow, to talk and laugh and joke and go round with her, same's young people could. And Mr. Scanlon's already spoke for, as you might say, and Mr. Holl's taken up with his politics, and Mr. Fairbanks — well, I don't like to run down my lodgers, but Mr. Fairbanks ain't so dependable as some. A girl's got to have friends, of course, but sooner than see her with some of these Boston slobs I'd take her down to the end of Long Wharf and push her off. I don't gener'ly feel any great responsibility for my lodgers, — I can't afford to for the few dollars I get out of it, — but she's a State o' Maine girl, like myself, and she's the kind that trusts people, and so gets hurt easy, and feels it clear through. Besides" — the landlady looked away, and lowered

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her voice — “ my little girl, if she'd lived, would have been just her age now. I don't suppose you're any better'n most men,” she added more briskly, “ but most men know the difference between a good girl and a bad one, and act accordin', and that's all I expect of you. So long's you ” —

She stopped short and sniffed the air in apprehension. A sound of splashing and hissing, somewhere beyond, followed almost instantly upon her change of attitude ; and then the landlady hurried down the hall. “ Katie's let the clothes boil over ! ” was the explanation she flung back to Carter.

He did not wait to inquire the fate of the clothes. He was more than willing to leave the conversation where luck had ended it. Mrs. Miles had hinted a disbelief of the exalted virtue of his sex ; she might have gone on to question his own rigidity of principle. As the case stood, however, she had paid him the compliment of asking him to entertain and console her *protégée* ; and — curiously uplifted as he was by a manifestation of trust that fell soothingly upon his self-reproachful spirit — he was not quite brave enough to give her a chance to qualify this tacit praise. He hurried downstairs into the crisp and searching winter air. Its tonic

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quality helped to heal his physical depression. Soon he was able to forget everything but the fact that he had been placed in charge of a charming girl. No man — not Holl himself — could assail the position of one whom a watchful matron had definitely named as guide, philosopher, and friend.

Business was rushing that day with the manufacturers of Vitalline, and, under the spell of agreeable thoughts, Carter generously gave his afternoon to their service. It was long after dark when he got back to the city. Then the streets, aglow with Christmas cheer and vocal with light-hearted "shoppers," chimed so closely with his mood that he spent an hour in aimless but observant wandering. For that space of time Miss Palmer's illness was forgotten. He felt a twinge of shame when the sight of Alfred, stamping and whistling on Miles's doorsteps, suddenly recalled it to him. He spoke hurriedly and sharply, as though present haste was a sort of atonement for past neglect. "How's Miss Palmer, Alfred?" he demanded.

"I guess she's pretty sick," the boy said soberly. "She's awful ugly."

"Oh!" said Carter, with relief. "That's a good sign. But what are you doing out here? Isn't it past your bed-time?"

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"I'm gettin' good and waked-up, 'cause I'm goin' to Merchant's, at ten o'clock, to bring Miss Dow home."

"Oh, you are, eh? What's the matter with my going with you?"

Alfred stared at him seriously. "Did she want you to?" he queried. Probably he saw that Carter hesitated, but he charitably omitted to press the question. "I s'pose you can," he conceded. "Only if she kicks I shall tell her I didn't ask you — and you'll have to pay your own car-fare, see?"

"All right," Carter agreed laughingly. "Let me know when you start."

He hunted up the landlady and got a favourable report of Miss Palmer, and then he decided to divert an hour with newspapers and pipes. Katie, or somebody, had lighted a fire in his stove, it appeared. Thanks to that heroic pigmy, the temperature of his room had been raised to an inconceivable degree. He tore off coat and waistcoat, threw up a window, and opened his door. Then he sat down in the draft. His back was towards the hall, and the noises of the street obscured approaching footsteps, so that the sound of words, "Hello, boss!" made him turn with a start. Scanlon had entered, wearing an expression of deepest gloom.

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"Hello, old man," Carter answered. "Why, what's up? She's doing well, isn't she?"

"Oh, *she's* all right." Scanlon dropped into a chair and put his feet on the table. "My tail's away down, that's what. I was goin' in to-night and have a talk with her, — sort of brace her up, you know, — but Old Stick-in-the-Mud says no, she must be kept quiet. So there's the girl in the dumps, I s'pose, and here am I chewin' the rag for both of us. If the girl could get well by day after to-morrow I'd send the old turtle a Christmas present of a dynamite cartridge — and that's no dream!"

"Shucks!" said Carter, unsympathetically. "You don't want to have any fuss with the girl's mother."

"Yes, I do. I want to, but I dasn't," Scanlon lamented. He brooded on his wrongs in silence until Carter roused him by pushing forward a pipe. "We'll all be sore on her before the winter's over," he prophesied glumly as he lighted it. "She's jealous of Miss Dow, for a starter; just let you or one of the other fellows pay Miss Dow a little attention, and she'll be down on him like a thousand o' brick, because he isn't stuck on her daughter instead; and yet she don't like me because I *am* stuck on her daughter. Oh, I tell you you may talk about

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your peaches, but she's a whole crate! Damfino what she does want! I got wheels in my head from tryin' to keep up with her motions last winter."

Jenks had come up the stairs. He stopped, alert and inscrutable, at the open door — evidently aware that the speaker had no desire to limit his audience. He smiled grimly when Scanlon, in conclusion, appealed to him. "What do you think of it?"

"I don't think of it," Jenks answered. "I have troubles of my own."

"Come in and smoke a pipe?" Carter suggested.

He shook his head. "If I listened long to Scanlon I'd have bad dreams. You take warning by him; fall in love with an orphan. By the way, I haven't seen much of you lately. What are you doing?"

"Writing advertisements, mostly."

"Gone in for making money, eh?"

"Well, hardly," Carter said, with a laugh. "I'm still poor but honest."

"So?" Jenks growled. "You shouldn't brag of it. Hell is so full of people in that condition that their feet are sticking out of the windows."

Scanlon and Carter looked at each other doubtfully as he tramped away. They could

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not quite believe the aphorism was meant to have an offensive application; yet it certainly afforded food for thought. Neither seemed quite prepared to make a comment. It was mainly to hide his helplessness, and for lack of something else to do, that Carter consulted his watch. "Hello!" he cried. "Too bad to run away from you, Scanlon, but I agreed to go up to Merchant's with Alfred, to get Miss Dow."

"Yes?" Scanlon wagged his head predictively and gazed at him with mournful interest. "I can see your finish. When the Frozen Pirate finds out that you've looked at another girl besides her girl" —

"Oh, rats!" Carter interrupted irritably. "Can't a man speak to a woman around here without being expected to buy a cook-stove and a cradle and set up housekeeping?"

"Not while the Galvanized Goddess is on deck you can't," was Scanlon's imperturbable answer. "And you can't even speak to her until the Easy Boss gives you the word." He sighed heavily as he knocked the ashes out of his pipe. "But, after all," he muttered, "there's no place like home — unless it's some other lodgin'-house. Ain't that right? Well, I guess I'll go in and say 'Damn' a few times, and go to bed."

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For some moments Carter paced angrily back and forth, questioning whether, after all these hints of exasperating interference, he should not let Alfred keep his appointment alone. He reflected, however, that to draw back now would argue childlike weakness. And how could he account for such a defection? What, indeed, would the girl think, when she learned that he had volunteered — and failed — to meet her? It was this consideration that decided him. Consigning all meddlesome old women to the devil, he set forth. His spirits rose somewhat, under the influence of action, — and Alfred. When Miss Dow showed herself not unpleasantly surprised to see him he definitely decided that he was glad he had come.

Nor did opportunity fail him to demonstrate an escort's usefulness. Even before they reached the street-cars he had served the girl by turning aside a jovial drunkard who wanted to shake hands with every passer-by. It was gently done. There was really no need of roughness, for the fellow was neither rude nor violent. "You'd better excuse her; she's in a hurry," Carter suggested; "but I'll shake twice with you, to make things even," — a compromise that so caught the fancy of the inebriate that he urgently desired its proponent to have a drink.

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Carter escaped, however, and came, chuckling, to the corner at which Miss Dow and Alfred were awaiting him. She was pale, he noticed; he wondered whether she had been frightened or shocked.

"It meets you everywhere, doesn't it?" she said vehemently — "the horrid liquor! Sometimes I think that if I had the power to do it I'd hang every man who sells rum!"

It was hardly thus that Carter would have wished a chat with a girl to begin; and he tried to give the conversation a less serious turn. "Spoken like a woman who came from Maine," he commented lightly.

"Why?" Evidently she missed the point. "I am a woman — perhaps that explains it. Women are always the ones to suffer. It's not only that a drunkard's wife or daughter is bound to be abused, but even a drunkard's acquaintance is liable to be — humiliated."

She caught her breath, preventing a sob. Carter understood, or thought he did, that the Thanksgiving dinner and the incident of the photograph were in her mind. Perhaps — it flashed across him — she even thought that that incident had prejudiced him against her, influenced him to keep away from her. Until this moment it had never occurred to him that she

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might thus account for his holding aloof; but he felt that, if she had done so, she had wronged him as well as herself; and he answered with some heat.

"Surely not!" he cried. "It isn't possible for a lady — yourself, let us say — to be lowered in the esteem of others by the antics of a boorish neighbor. Nobody could be so idiotic, or so unjust, as to hold her responsible for a fool's deeds."

"You think so. Women are held responsible for a good many things! Oh, well, I suppose I'm blue, because I'm tired," she concluded, with an effort at brightness. "Let's talk about something pleasanter. What's my boy been doing to-day?" and she laid a caressing hand on Alfred's shoulder.

"Oh, I ain't done much of anything — but comin' up to Merchant's and the *Star* office, them two times, to tell you and Frank how Miss Palmer was. When I went back the second time," the boy added, with unconscious pathos, "I stopped over't the Frog Pond, 'n' watched the other fellers skate."

"Is it a case for Santa Claus?" Carter asked Miss Dow, over the boy's head.

She made him, privately, a sign of warning. "Alfred and I don't believe in Santa Claus," she said as they boarded the electric.

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"He doesn't seem to be very chipper about it."

"No. It's not so easy to be happy after one begins to doubt. Haven't you wished, sometimes, that you could go to the place where the fairy stories all come true?"

She sighed wearily as she spoke; her head drooped a little, and she closed her eyes. Studying her face in profile, at his leisure, Carter freshened his sense of its fine clearness of outline and its softness of texture. Yet, after all, there were prettier girls. To see her at her best, he decided, one should see her when interested, excited, pleased, perhaps angry, even. And how would some of the "prettier girls" bear that test of translating emotion into expression? All in all, Miss Dow's was a permanent charm and —

But here she seemed to become conscious of his protracted gaze, and she turned her head, colouring resentfully. It was by way of Alfred that Carter made his peace, leading the boy into dialogue that necessitated frequent appeals to Miss Dow. They were on very good terms by the time the car stopped at Miles's corner, and he ventured on the familiar tone of friendship when, as he bade her good-night, he asked, "Are you going to let Alfred and me come after you to-morrow evening?"

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"Why, yes, — if you want to," she answered doubtfully.

"I *do* want to," Carter said with significant emphasis. The conviction was strong upon him that he really did.

VIII

AGAIN, on Christmas Eve, they met and rode home together; and having then, as he felt, perfected his peace with Miss Dow, Carter looked forward with a sort of confident anticipation to Christmas Day itself. He had ensured a joyous awakening by opening his closet door when he went to bed; and he was roused, as he had expected to be, in the very early morning — when Alfred hailed with a happy shout the packages he found in the hall, stacked against his own door. Carter rubbed his eyes and shamelessly began to listen, as out from the depths of slumber issued a querulous voice: “What you doin’ out o’ bed, Alfud?”

“Wish you Merry Christmas, father!” the boy cried.

“Oh — ah — um — ye — ah; same to you,” the father mumbled, and resumed his interrupted snores. But Alfred, it seemed, conveyed his spoils to a window and lifted the curtain; for he had barely had time to say, “There, now! I knew I’d get a pair o’ skates!” when a wilder exclamation pierced the silence. “God sake!” the father yelled; and Carter heard a bed creak, as though the speaker had risen up suddenly. “Oh, it’s that cussèd electric shinin’ in!” were

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the words of relief that came a moment later. "Go to t'other winder, Alfud. I dreamt — the house wuz — a-fire."

"Thank you for the rubber boots, father!"

"Uh — huh — h," Nichols grunted sleepily.

For a little while there was quiet in the next room — a quiet broken only by the sounds of rended strings and tearing paper. Then Alfred began to talk to himself; and Carter, straining for the words, caught so many that he readily inferred the rest. "That's good candy in *that* box," the monologue ran. "Ho! this box ain't candy; it's a little steam-engine! Bully! I bet you Mis' Palmer gi' me the Bible 'n' the pair o' wristers tied up together. By gosh! the's a dollar bill inside the Bible! I hope Net Palmer gi' me the dollar bill — 'cause if Mis' Palmer did I'll have to put it in the conterbution. Darn the old heathen, anyway! Two books 'n' a jack-knife, three-blader — Ow! that's good 'n' sharp! — 'n' two undershirts, 'n' two pair o' drawers, 'n' six han'kerchi'fs. Katie gi' me them han'kerchi'fs, 'cause I borried hers. Oh, darn! my finger's bleedin' on the undershirts. But *that's* the boss! I bet you Frank" —

The words were cut short by a resounding crash. It started Nichols up once more. "God sake!" he cried. "Wha's that?"

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"I dropped the tool-chest," Alfred answered.

"Huh?"

"The box o' tools Frank give me."

Nichols groaned and seemed to sink back on his pillow. "Say, Alfud, my son," he expostulated in tones that told of painful self-restraint, "your father's a hard-workin' man, and he needs his rest."

"Yes, father," said the boy, soothingly, "I'll go out, now, 'n' leave my Christmas presents for folks at folks's doors. I won't wake you up when I come back."

And here entertainment ended. Alfred's further movements were catlike for softness. The sombre quietude that seems peculiar to a winter dawn settled once more upon the house. Carter idly pulled aside his curtain and looked for a moment into the street. He turned away, shivering. All these dull and formal brick houses were an embodied protest against sunshine. He felt a spasm of longing for the Florida he had never seen and the Italy he had only dreamed about. Well, success would grant him the privilege of these; and he cast a prophetic eye towards his work-table. But then it occurred to him that for three weeks he had done very little work — except in the interest of Vitalline. He had not even perfected that story of renun-

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ciation, of the man who, because he was poor and prospectless, freely resigned to another man the girl he loved. That was a task to set about at once. He could view the situation impersonally now — as an artist should. He assured himself, proudly, that much of his absurd and squeamish sensitiveness had been gotten rid of in the three weeks. For instance, he knew now that a woman belongs to the man who can win her, and only an idiot would let himself be influenced by the hopes or wishes of any other man.

The vexing memory of Holl's generous passion being thus dismissed, his mind fixed upon Miss Dow herself. Her face, her form, her voice, her attitudes, her movements were clearly before him — all her charms heightened, it may be, by woman's most unscrupulous ally, an artist's imagination. He dwelt upon the fashion of her mirth, the slow and thoughtful smile that dawned in her eyes and came to perfection on her lips before it rippled into laughter. He sounded the depths of those great grey eyes that could be so cold — or so tender. Daringly his fancy adventured to trace the pliant curves that no garmenting could quite obscure — that were demonstrated, indeed, by every free, graceful, unstudied motion of her lithe young limbs. Imperceptibly

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thus he lost sight of the comradeship of intellect and spirit, and thought of her merely as exquisite flesh and blood. Longings that (so potent is purity) never stirred when he was in her presence, roused to torment and shame him. In desperation he hunted up a novel, perched uncomfortably on the edge of his bed, and, in the dull half-light of earliest morning, strained sight and mind to read closely and fathom an intricate plot. Self-punishment yielded a certain satisfaction. Yet he was quick to throw away the book, and rise, when his ears told him that others at last were stirring. And he was none too prompt. He had hardly finished dressing when a knock sounded at his door, and he opened to the person he least expected to see, Fairbanks.

"Merry Christmas to yeh, Mr. Carter!" cried the caller, genially.

"Thank you," said Carter, surprised into yielding a nerveless hand.

"I'm 'round squarin' myself," Fairbanks explained with a mirthless cackle that seemed to stand for laughter. "I got a notion I was sort o' flip, Thanksgivin' Day. If I said or done anything to hurt your feelin's I'm sorry for it. Don't seem right to have any such little grudges last over Christmas, does it? Fact is, I was gettin' over a toot that time, an' I own up to it,

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I was twisted. Why, I've laid up there in my room, before now, when I hadn't had a drink for days, and heard folks talkin' about me down in the street, four stories down! That shows yeh I ain't responsible when I'm recoverin', any more 'n' I am when I'm loaded, n'r hardly so much, an' people hadn't ought to mind it if I do some blatherin', for it's because I get things into my head. I can't talk no fairer 'n' that, can I?"

To think of Fairbanks journeying through the house distributing apologies and good wishes, like a conscientious letter-carrier, irresistibly tempted to laughter; but Carter checked himself at a chuckle, and offered his hand again. "Oh, that's all right," he said. "I'm not hunting a scrap, ever. Come in and have a smoke?"

"No, thank yeh. I must go 'n' sing my song to the rest of 'em. So long!" He moved to Nichols's door. Carter yearned to listen. He only saved himself by seizing his hat and fleeing to the Klondike.

Here also they kept Christmas. A placard in the window invited all and sundry to "Try Our Turkey Dinner, 12 to 3 o'clock, Five Courses, all you can eat, Only 20 Cents." Over the head of the burly "boss," who sat in his shirt-sleeves behind the counter, industriously chewing tobacco, hung an evergreen wreath. Most of

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the patrons had that relaxed, indifferent air which tells the temporary stupefaction caused by unaccustomed slumber; yet there was human-kindness in their voices, and when they roused at all it was to friendly deeds and words. Altruism was in the air. Carter embodied some of it in the dollar he gave to Maggie, the table-girl. Then he exchanged a two-dollar bill for forty nickels, and started to fulfil a gracious inspiration. Almost anywhere in the retail district one could find small boys and girls who hopelessly studied shop windows; and Carter dropped his nickels in gaping pockets, or slipped them into the grimy paws that were clasped in desperate resignation behind tattered backs. Sometimes he did it clumsily, and was detected; but then he brazenly denied any hand in the gift, and enforced the denial with a show of anger. To watch the play of emotions — joy, surprise, bewilderment, incredulous gratitude — upon these children's faces was a keen delight; and yet, demanding so much of comprehension and sympathy on his own part, it proved in the ultimate effect a trifle fatiguing. It was only eleven o'clock when he got back to Miles's, but he felt as though he had lived out a day.

And then all in a moment, while he plodded thoughtfully up to the third floor, he realized

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that the day had just begun — for Miss Dow suddenly appeared at the landing. “Merry Christmas!” they exclaimed in the same breath. Then they laughed in unison. “I’d be proud to think you took the trouble to climb up here to say it to me,” Carter added jestingly.

“Why, didn’t you know we’re near neighbours?” the girl answered. “Mrs. Palmer was bound to be with Nettie, so she and I changed rooms for a few days. I want to thank you for the flowers, Mr. Carter,” she hurried on. “They were lovely!” Then, as the young man bowed, but deprecated further words, “Nettie would like to thank you, too,” she added. “Don’t you want to come down to our — her room, a minute?”

“Has Mrs. Palmer gone to church?”

“Yes. Why?”

“Then I’ll come,” he responded lightly. “Don’t hurry, though; give *me* a chance to ask a question. Will you do me the honour to go to the theatre with me this afternoon?”

“Go to a *matinée* on such a pleasant day?” She had taken up his buoyant tone. “Why, that’s an insult to the Creator!”

“Yes’m,” Carter said with meekness. “It does seem sinful to stay indoors, doesn’t it? Will you take a walk with me? — just as you

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might if we were 'way down East, where they don't have *matinées*."

"I think I might go out for a little while at three o'clock. Yes? Very well. Now come and speak to Miss Palmer, please. I think Mr. Scanlon's there, poor fellow!" she murmured as they turned to descend. "These are the first happy moments he's had since Sunday."

It was so far from Carter's wish to hamper his friend's joys that, after he had said the words that courtesy demanded to Miss Palmer, — a pale, perspiring bundle in an easy-chair, — he made haste to withdraw. This time he encountered Jenks at the head of the stairs. It was only with a grunt that Jenks replied to Carter's greeting; but it was an amiable grunt; the Christmas spirit, or another, had softened him; and presently, somewhat to Carter's surprise, Jenks was sitting in one of his chairs and smoking one of his pipes.

"What are you up to?" Jenks asked, after a while.

He nodded towards the manuscripts on the table. Carter was not quite willing to admit that most of them pertained to *Vitalline*, and when a saving thought occurred to him he exploited it boldly. "I think I shall write a realistic novel of Boston," he declared.

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Jenks stared abstractedly over his head. "There are only a few men who know Boston," he muttered, as though in soliloquy. "Some of them are on the police force. Most of the others are in jail."

Carter waited expectantly.

/ "It's six — yes, almost seven weeks since you came to Miles's. Think because you've been living in a lodging-house and getting your grub at the Klondike that you understand the South End, heh?"

Carter smiled and shook his head.

"Of course there's a story at every street corner," Jenks meditated aloud. "A man with eyes can't miss it. But a novelist needs something besides eyes, and something besides the ability to string words together; he needs heart and conscience. Could you be trusted with a woman alone on a desert island?"

"Why — I — don't see" — The young man's face told that he groped in vain for the other's meaning.

"You pass as a moral man, because, though you may have a brute's instincts, the force of public opinion restrains their exhibition; but how would you act if a woman was at your mercy? *Then* the essential man would show. So it would if you undertook to picture this existence

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that we're a part of. The critics, and most of your readers, wouldn't be able to tell whether you'd done us justice or not; in other words, you'd be in about the same relative position as the man on the desert island. You might violate all the decencies of our mean little lives — and it would all be devilish funny, I grant you — or you might — Oh, fudge!" he ended abruptly. "If you've got any whiskey I wouldn't mind taking a drink."

Carter served him; and then, "Why not tell me the rest?" Carter suggested.

"Oh, that was all," Jenks responded placidly. "By the way, why wouldn't an old crank like me fit into your story? You needn't consider my feelings, you know; I haven't any; and all my nerves are non-conductors." For one awful moment he fixed Carter with a compelling eye. Then he looked away and laughed. "Don't let my interest in literature embarrass you," he said. "It comes natural to me; I once wrote a book myself. The publishers gave away a hundred and six copies, press copies and others, and sold a hundred and seven. Imagine what a blow it would have been if they'd given away a hundred and seven and only sold a hundred and six! Good-day to you!"

As usual, he left Carter tingling as one tingles

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after trying a galvanic battery; but these were stimulating shocks that Jenks administered; and though Carter's meditations were coloured with resentment, they were full of purpose. Why should he not write a realistic novel? he asked himself; and why, if it seemed good to him, should he not put in Jenks? Say, for instance, that a man like Jenks set out to study the diverse tactics of the Socialists and the Salvation Army — the one organization proposing man's temporal improvement; the other, his spiritual reformation; but both addressing their efforts, in the main, to the same class.

At first blush it appealed to Carter as a most promising scheme. It would permit the introduction of any type of character, and the action might pass in places that, for the purposes of fiction, are unhackneyed. Under such conditions, Jenks might undergo almost any odd and diverting experience. Suppose one added the comedy element by depicting old Jenks and a young Socialist leader in love with a pretty Salvationist whose chief concern was their souls? Carter roared, and hugged himself for delight in his own cleverness, as the idea came to him. He would have been slow to admit that he planned revenge for Jenks's unsparing cynicisms, yet he did not blink the fact that by such a design Jenks

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would be made ridiculous. Of course, after all, Jenks's warped and one-sided nature would only portray itself; Carter would be more than generous to one so unfortunately constituted: Jenks should say all the bright things in the book. And when at this point it occurred to Carter that his hero-comedian, a bubbling fountain of wit and wisdom, an irrepressible adviser of others, would be, by inexorable circumstance, stripped of his armour of superiority, made a fool of by events, — then indeed his joy in his own creation was complete.

“ I'll run across the way for a piece of pie and a glass of milk,” he muttered, glancing at his watch, “ and then I'll have two hours to try to lay out the thing — until three o'clock. By Jove, I'll make the girl the heroine of it, bless her ! ”

IX

HE was all aglow with that chivalrous intention when, at three o'clock, he went to the parlour to meet Miss Dow. He took it for granted that she would be interested in his plan and that, though she might hesitate to admit as much, she would be pleased, if not grateful. Therefore he wanted to tell her about it; but somehow the thing was not easy to put into words; and he was so loath to dissipate his thoughts by opening another subject that they two set off up Washington street, towards Roxbury, almost in silence. In default of speech, by way of strengthening his inspiration, he looked at her as frequently as he might; and quite unconsciously he began to compare her with the type of devoted womanhood that he aimed to portray. It was easy to imagine her a Salvation captain—barring the jerky, shuffling gait which a Salvationist acquires by marching to "rag-time" music. He disliked the idea of adapting her steps to *that*, even in fiction. Involuntarily he spoke. "I wish I could show you exactly as you are!" he exclaimed.

"I'm afraid I don't understand," she replied. Carter was aware of tolerance as well as wonder in her voice, as though she had already learned

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that a literary man is not always to be taken seriously.

"I want to put you in a novel," he blurted. It was not the way he would have chosen to state the case; but now that the murder was out he could talk more freely. "It won't hurt," he went on. "It's merely a matter of smiling and looking pleasant, as you do at the photographer's. Honestly, I mean to write a realistic story of Boston life. I can't afford to leave out Miles's — either the place or the people; and I'd like to try a study of you in the rôle of heroine."

"Yes? And the others?"

"Well, I think Jenks would be a — an amusing character. Don't you?"

"What does he think?"

"Oh, he won't mind." Carter felt a little uncomfortable, but he managed a laugh. "He practically told me to describe him and be — blessed!"

"Indeed! Has it ever occurred to you that Mr. Jenks is a sensitive man? that his gruffness may be only his way of self-defence?"

"Hardly."

"I believe it's so," the girl said thoughtfully. "I'm afraid you don't know us yet, Mr. Carter. How can you, as long as you feel superior and hold yourself above us? Of course you might

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succeed in picturing the outsides of us. You might parade Mrs. Miles's oddities, for instance ; but what about her angelic kindness to people who never even thank her? You don't see that, and intuition will never reveal it to you — because you're not in sympathy with Mrs. Miles. You *can't* read her nature. Why, Mr. Carter, sympathy is the very beginning of knowledge ! ”

“ I've always rather prided myself on being sympathetic,” urged Carter feebly.

“ Have you? I've sometimes fancied you were. But if you were really interested in us, would you ever think of making use of us? ”

He could not look her in the face and answer. “ Well, I ” — he began ; but he did not know what he should say ; and he was glad when his attention was diverted and his speechlessness overshadowed by a tragi-comedy of the street. A hard-featured girl, escorted by a slim, sallow, beardless youth, had overtaken and passed them. Approaching, and near at hand, were two gorgeous young women whose sensational manner suggested that they were not quite sober. The parties recognised each other. Into the eyes of one of the young women flashed the light of battle. The slim young man slunk aside ; the girl stiffened herself and waited, conscious, evidently, that she was no match for the elder virago, but

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scorning to run. Then into twenty seconds of blasphemous obscenity the aggressor crowded the lore of a lifetime; she struck the girl twice in the face with a stout and practised fist; grinned at her crony, who had damned her affectionately and advised her to forbearance; and with a last hissing epithet and a scornful laugh stalked victoriously away.

The incident passed in a moment. It was impossible to escape the sight and sound of it; and all that Carter could do, as a ribald crowd began to gather, was to guide his companion into one of those quiet streets that lead to Columbus avenue. She looked white and sick, he noticed; he was not at all prepared to have her say suddenly, with a backward nod of the head, "I suppose you think a realistic novel should be mostly *that*?"

"N — no," he answered, a trifle consciously. "Nevertheless, a realist must treat it."

"Yes, but how? Why not with charity — a charity as deep as the mercy of God?"

Carter looked away from her. Probably his voice expressed his discomposure. "I'm afraid you haven't much faith in my ability, or my conscience," he said soberly.

"Yes, I have, Mr. Carter. Truly I have. All I intended in the first place was to ask you if

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you really thought it — er — expedient to picture living people. It seemed to me a question of ethics or a question of taste, just as one might look at it. But *I* didn't propose to settle it for you. I know you'll do right, when you come to think it all over. And by the way," she added acutely, "how long has it been since you decided to write the novel?"

The question probed a weakness which Carter in secret had often lamented — a tendency to exhibit his impulses as though they were matured and defensible plans. Because of his sensitiveness on this point, he was more willing to be accused of deliberate brutality than of unreasoning haste. Yet he wished to avoid either implication: evasion seemed the only means.

"For obvious reasons," he said, "I couldn't have thought of *you* in that connection more than seven weeks ago, could I? And yet, do you know, it seems as though I have known you always."

"If you had I'm afraid you'd never dream of making a heroine of me," she laughed. "Leave me out, will you, please?"

He glanced at her deprecatingly, — and somewhat reproachfully, — but he did not argue. On the whole, it seemed safer to let the matter rest. He cast about for some remark that would take

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her thoughts from it. He hoped that she was not reviving it when all at once she said—desperately, it seemed — “ I wish I could ask you a question and be sure you wouldn’t misunderstand.”

“ Try me.”

“ Well, did you send me anything besides the flowers? ”

He shook his head.

“ I suppose it’s only fair to tell you why I asked.” Apparently the subject was distasteful, and yet her eyes suggested that it had its amusing side. “ Somebody gave me a toilet set. I don’t know who — but I’m afraid I suspect.”

So did Carter. He divined, however, that she would be offended if he named Fairbanks outright, and he took a roundabout way to suggest his thought. “ Ah! ” he said indifferently. “ You’re not the only person who gets Christmas gifts. I had one. Mr. Fairbanks presented me with a large, round apology — painted red, with a lantern attached, as it were. I hope he had the decency to do the same by you? ”

“ Yes, some time ago.”

“ And accounted for his possession of your photograph? ”

“ He took it from Mrs. Miles’s album,” she answered briefly.

“ Did he return it to you? ”

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"Yes."

"Will you give it to me?"

"Certainly not."

There was neither indecision nor coquetry in the tone, and Carter, sulkily recognising the fact, wondered why she should so resolutely snub him. So much of the countryman clung to the youth that, when he ceased to be foolishly bashful, it was natural for him to be as foolishly bold — either infirmity being, in the last analysis, the outcome of isolation and ignorance. It was equally natural, perhaps, that, having practically begun his experience of women by an intimacy with a bad woman, he should tend to refer the whole sex to her pliable standards. He could only account for Miss Dow's refusal by assuming that he had spoken inopportunistically — when she was out of sorts — or that the form of his request was at fault; surely the request, in itself, was a compliment. It even flashed across his mind that a shop girl should feel it an honour thus to oblige a professional man; but he had the grace to put away that sentiment, just as his companion, motioning him to listen, demanded: "Do you know what she's playing?"

"Not I."

"I think — yes, it *is* Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata. It's very well played, too. I some-

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times wonder," she sighed, "whether I could pick out a note now."

"How can one forget a thing that's been thoroughly learned?"

"Oh, it's easy. If I told you the tax a man paid, and the rate of taxation, could you tell me the amount he was taxed upon? No? But perhaps you didn't thoroughly learn your arithmetic. Seriously, environment counts for a good deal, in such matters. We do forget accomplishments that we have no chance to practise, and we learn to do the things our associates do. For instance, I could talk English once, but I suppose one of these days I'll be saying 'I seen' and 'I done.'"

"But about the piano," Carter persisted; "why didn't you take a room at some place where you could have the use of one?"

"Aren't you confounding me with my employer? *He's* the millionaire. Of course," she admitted less impatiently, "I could go to the Young Women's Christian Association, or some house of that kind. I haven't done it, because—well, because I don't want to be told what time I shall go to bed. A little independence is worth a whole street-full of pianos. And then, you see, we get all the rules we can stand, at the shop."

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"Speaking of rules," — she looked at him judicially, not to say severely, as though appraising his capacity to follow her thought, — "I believe if I employed people, or managed an 'institution,' I'd have just as few as possible. Life cramps us sorely enough. It isn't right for other people to put on extra screws, just because they can. I said you ought to be charitable, didn't I? Well, that's because I think there are not many persons who plan to do evil. The reason why men and women 'go wrong,' as the saying is, is that monotony fairly maddens them, and they've got to do something *different*! Some can find relaxation in going to prayer-meeting. Others can't. Is it God's will that the others should be — be wasted, I wonder? I wish I could *be* God for long enough to take some of the round pegs out of the square holes and give them a chance! There's a girl in our shop who ought to be an — African missionary — or something — in some place where she would have to watch and plan and contrive every minute. *Then* she'd be useful and happy and good. I know it. But I suppose if you should put her in a book, after she — goes down hill, you'd call her hard names and make people think she was born bad."

"I wouldn't," Carter retorted — angrily

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aware that he endured illogical injustice. It struck him, even in that frenzied moment, that only the feminine intellect could have devised a taunt so hard to answer. "If you expect me to be charitable, why don't you try to be charitable to me?" he demanded.

"Oh, did I vex you? I beg your pardon," Miss Dow said in sweet surprise. "I've been talking a lot, haven't I? I'm not going to say another word until we pass West Chester park — or is it Massachusetts-avenue park they call it now? It's lovely in there, in the summer, isn't it?" she went on, "with the big trees and the fountain and the children" —

"And the caterpillars," Carter added grumpily.

The girl frowned. "Now, why should you drag in the caterpillars?" she protested. "Why can't we talk about pleasant things? Tell me what you're doing."

"I'm not doing much of anything, except to boom that patent medicine," the young man confessed.

"Oh, well, of course there are people who believe in patent medicines and like to hear about new ones." She seemed so anxious to make the best of it that Carter, who had not forgotten his wound, eyed her with sudden dis-

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trust. "Perhaps it would be good for Miss Palmer. Why don't you get her a bottle?"

"'Twouldn't be of any use to any of our folks — but Fairbanks. I think it would just about hit his complaint."

"Oh!" The word was colorless; her face told nothing; and Carter, who regretted the slur as soon as he had uttered it, was willing not to know whether it was comprehended. They had reached the corner of Tremont street, and he unprotestingly allowed her to lead the way towards home: if he provoked her to speak, unpleasant speech might follow. Nevertheless, when Holl went by them — smiling somewhat constrainedly, as he lifted his hat — the encounter nerved Carter to take the risk. "It's rather early yet," he said, almost in the tone of challenge, as though it were in Holl's hearing; "but why shouldn't you come down town with me, by and by, and get a Christmas dinner at one of the hotels?"

"I'm not dressed for a big dining-room," she demurred.

"You're not? Why, if other girls in Boston looked like you, to-day, they'd be going around in processions, with brass bands!"

"Besides, Nettie might want something."

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"Nettie has her mamma. And I'm a poor orphan."

"I don't believe I'll go, anyhow, thank you. I don't feel quite like it."

"All right," Carter agreed. "But you ought to promise to go somewhere with me, soon, if you're bound to disappoint me this time. May I take you to church next Sunday? And what about to-morrow night? Will you let me stand on the corner, then, and watch you come up the street?"

"Surely! And you may carry my umbrella to the car, when I go on my vacation next summer — if you'll be good."

"Where do you spend your vacations, Miss Dow?"

"On an island in Casco bay, Mr. Carter."

"But where in the world is Casco bay?"

"Oh, I can't be bothered with such an ignorant person! Ask Mrs. Miles or Mr. Holl."

"'Mr. Holl!'" Carter sneered. His smile had faded and his voice was full of bitterness. "So Holl was there too, was he? What doing? — waiting on the table? Or preaching Socialism to the other clams?"

The girl turned her head and looked him up and down. Carter shrunk before her blazing eyes. Yet she was most beautiful in this new

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guise of fierceness; even whilst he trembled he was able to admire. Happily for him, perhaps, she would not trust herself to answer at once. She only quickened her pace, so that the young man fell a step behind, until she turned once more. "I think you're very coarse and very rude," she said tremulously. "You may be sorry for insulting a man who has only good words for you, when I tell you that Mr. Holl came down East — not to my island — to help a poor, friendless fellow who was dying there. I didn't know about it until months after, and I never heard a whisper of it from Mr. Holl himself."

"I'm sorry!" Carter stammered; but she hurried on and seemed to pay no heed. Then the young man yielded to a reckless impulse to right himself by explaining himself fully. "I'm sorry — and I'm ashamed," he added earnestly, if incoherently. "The thing took me by surprise. I couldn't bear to think of another fellow being with you, because" — He had to break off to return the greeting of a police captain who recognised and saluted him, and he went on with less intensity: "I'd as soon tell you why, right here in the middle of Tremont street."

"You'd better not tell me anything!" came the vehement interruption. "I'm cross, and I don't care to talk."

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Carter bowed, with an assumption of dignified indifference. He wanted to cultivate a sense of injury; but other emotions were easier to detach from the huddle that thronged his mind — irritation that he had shown so little tact; sensuous appreciation of the girl's vivid and colourful manner; and, it must be confessed, a suspicion of relief that she had prevented him from saying more. Withal he felt a comforting conviction that under such circumstances any woman must soon "come around" — that she would be much more charitable to an outburst of jealousy than she would be to a hint of indifference. And after they had walked a block or two, and the surcharged silence began to pall, Carter masterfully determined to end it: he subdued his face to an expression of penitence and woe. He could not have affirmed that Miss Dow noticed the change, yet he mentally commended his own cleverness and approved his intuitive knowledge of womankind, when it came about that she was the first to speak.

"It's too bad our walk should be spoiled," she lamented; "but" —

"It was all my fault. But I said I was sorry, you know."

"Yes, it was your fault," the girl responded unyieldingly. "And I like Mr. Holl — and re-

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spect him; too, — which is very much more to the purpose, — so I don't wish to — But there! Let's forget it!"

"Gladly. We're all done weeping and scolding, and we'll laugh awhile. Let's make fun of Mrs. Palmer."

She smiled, but shook her head. "Mrs. Palmer's a serious subject," she said. "Ask Mr. Scanlon if she isn't. Besides, I don't like to make fun of anybody. If I look closely enough I can see almost anybody's faults in myself."

"But you don't mean to say that if *you* had a sweet young daughter you'd build a fence around her?"

"Oh, I can't tell," she sighed. "I might. I'm like most people—I seldom know what I'm going to do until after I've done it."

There was weariness in her voice, and, looking at her closely, Carter saw it expressed in her face and her movements also. Yet they had not walked far. Probably, he reflected, the momentary unpleasantness had worn upon her nerves; and it was possible, too, that she was not accustomed to meet people whose conversation called for continuous exercise of the intellect. His heart warmed towards her on the basis of his own fatuity. Now that she began

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to droop a little he forgot that she had snubbed, corrected, lessoned, and reproved him; his fancy recalled their talk as mainly composed of his own gems of thought—for which she had heroically aspired to supply a setting; and since she had fatigued herself in that laudable endeavour he yearned to cherish and protect her. He was wondering what tranquil joys he could offer for an evening hour, when a woful exclamation brought him back to the present.

“Oh, my!” Miss Dow said in dismay. “There’s that man at the steps!”

“Eh? Oh, yes, Fairbanks. Well, we can take another turn around the block and give him a chance to clear out.”

“No, I’m tired,” she answered in a rapid undertone. “Besides, he has seen us, and I’m sure he’d wait till we came back. *Don’t* let him keep us talking there, will you?”

Yet, after the manner of woman, she was brave when the time came. She put away her scared and apprehensive look, as they drew nearer. She even forced a smile to accompany her nod. The man on the steps returned the smile with interest, and hailed them while they were still half a rod away.

“Hope you’re havin’ a Merry Christmas, Miss Dow?” he cried. “You, too, Mr. Carter!”

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I am. Sure! Never spent so much for Christmas things any year before, as I have this year. But I'm makin' good money, you know, and I don't value money none alongside o' people I like."

"Yes?" said Carter, coldly. He had preceded Miss Dow up the steps, to open the door. Ironical chance decreed that his latch-key should stick in the keyhole. It had never done so before. Now it balked crosswise of the lock and refused to turn or to come out, while Carter savagely tugged at it, and Miss Dow stood listening helplessly to Fairbanks's suggestive gabble of Christmas gifts.

"Bought some o' my presents up't your store, Miss Dow," Fairbanks ran on. "That was proper, wa'n't it? I thought it was kind'f appropriate — considerin'. Just makes me think, though, seein' an old chum of mine go by, loaded for bear, that I made myself a Christmas present. I made up my mind I ain't ever goin' to take another drink. I've quit. Yes, sir! No use waitin' till New Year's Day, is" —

"*There!* and be hanged to it!" Carter exclaimed, as the refractory key at length decided to yield. He slammed the door open and Miss Dow slipped past him and ran upstairs. Fairbanks interrupted his discourse to make some

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good-humoured comment; but Carter answered him curtly and slammed the door shut again. Miss Dow had disappeared. He was glad of that. He wanted to feel free to scowl and swear over the mischance that — as is the habit of trifles — had vexed him more than a real calamity might. Yet he felt obliged to dispense with his frown when he reached the head of the stairway. Mrs. Palmer was in the hall — she had just come from Mrs. Miles's kitchen — and he did not care to show her a black and threatening face.

"I hope it isn't too late to wish you a Merry Christmas, Mrs. Palmer," Carter said as amiably as he could.

"Thank you, Mr. Carter. I'm satisfied with Christmas, as long as my little girl is doin' well. I wonder who it was that just come in?" she added questioningly.

"Miss Dow. She and I have been to walk."

"Oh, have you?"

It seemed as though she checked a sigh at its beginning. She looked at him: a glance that blended comprehension, forbearance, sympathy, and motherly regard. Carter stared back at her in impotent amazement; and when, with no more words, she had gone into her room and shut the door, he continued to stare at the door.

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He felt that he had somewhat to say to her — somewhat that he hardly knew how to phrase. Was she jealous for her daughter — or what? That was the thing he wanted to know. And when he realized that she would not reappear, and that he was not quite prepared to drag her out and catechise her, he took a furious resolution that he and she should very shortly be frank with each other.

X

IT chanced, however, that though his intention did not waver, his temper had time to cool. Miss Palmer suffered an "ill turn" that night; and for several days succeeding, he would have been a brave man — perhaps a heartless — who should have carried any remoter interest into the room where the fiercely devoted mother watched over her young. In the meantime Carter plumed himself on seeing as much as he could of Miss Dow. Happily he was able to blink the fact that curiosity and wounded pride were prompting him to know what, if anything, could be said against a girl he had approved; he romanced the inquiry he had planned, as a disinterested attempt to seek out and strangle calumny on behalf of defenceless womanhood. That he should not forsake the girl before he knew the truth, that he should even be a little more devoted, — this was needful to perfect the drama of chivalry in which, he felt, he was playing so knightly a part.

More or less of theatricality must have tinged his manner in these days; he was lavish of exalted sentiment and poetic phrases; and Miss Dow looked at him, occasionally, as though she suspected him of quizzing her. At such times she steadfastly declined to respond to any allure-

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ment. And yet her mistrustful silence was easier to bear than that phase of cordiality in which she asked questions about his work. Carter liked to talk of his own doings, and it irked him sorely to ward off interrogation and suggest a less inspiring subject. But this he must do — or admit that he had slighted her admonition and begun his realistic novel.

She was in it. So was Jenks. He believed that she would ultimately indorse her own portrait. He hoped that this creation would reconcile her to the less flattering studies, that of Jenks, for instance. And if he could go to her with a publisher's letter of acceptance, which would be an indication, if not a promise, of success, he might properly ask her, he thought, to put away prejudice and reconsider the whole case. Every afternoon, therefore, he freed his mind of Vitalline, and slaved at his story. He estimated that he could write a thousand words a day; at that rate the novel would be finished in two months. Then a month or so for revision, another month for negotiations with a publisher, — and hey for wealth and fame, sure passports to the esteem of woman!

Yet, passing any question of the soundness of his conclusions, he soon had to admit that certain of his premises were at fault. It was neces-

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sary to make allowance for the days of the empty brain and the weary hand — days when the work that was done cried to heaven to be undone, so drearily witless was it. On such an afternoon, unfruitful within, and bleak and cheerless without as befitted the last of the year, Carter threw down his pen and resolved to attempt the interview that he had decided upon a week earlier. He armed himself with a box of Malaga grapes and rapped at Miss Palmer's door.

"Whoever it is, ask 'em to come in, ma," he heard Miss Palmer say. "I'm just blue-moulded!" A scurry of preparation followed, a sound of movables tucked into drawers or thrown in the closet. It was most rapid and violent, for the moment that it lasted. Nor had it quite ended when Mrs. Palmer, breathing heavily from her exertions, admitted Carter; she took a hat-box out of the chair in which she motioned him to sit; and her smile of welcome was shortened by a stealthy, comprehensive glance that seemed to question the propriety of all things. She wavered between the dressing-case and the bed, apparently meditating further concealments, while her daughter, less punctilious, was greeting Carter joyously.

"I'm awful glad to see you, Mr. Carter," Miss Palmer said. "Oh, not because of the grapes

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— but I thank you for 'em ever so much. It's terrible, you know, to be cooped up this way when you've been used to bein' in a crowd. I'm not strong enough to sew much, — I don't like to sew, anyhow, — and I don't care much for readin', and sitting here and counting the electrics isn't very excitin.' If I could just see some of the girls at the shop, some of the mean girls, and have a real old-fashioned scrap, I think it would do me good. But ma won't even fight!"

"I will, if it'll gratify you," laughed Carter. "What shall we fight about?"

"Oh, I'm sure I don't know. I s'pose" — she smiled at him meaningly — "if I wanted to be unreasonable I could find fault with you for takin' Floss away from me these evenings. But I don't blame you. If I was a man I'd do it myself."

For a moment Carter hesitated, and thought rapidly. Then he rose to the emergency, glad, on the whole, that his opening had come so soon. "Yes," he said, — a watchful eye upon the older woman, — "I think Miss Dow is a very sweet and charming girl."

"That's what she is!" Miss Palmer spoke as though she meant it. But then she glanced at her mother, and laughed. "Ma don't like her, because she's better-lookin' than I am."

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"Why, Annette Palmer! You'd ought to be ashamed! I wouldn't think of such a thing, even if it was *so*, — and it ain't!" There was not much anger in Mrs. Palmer's voice, but the excursive words indicated some perturbation of spirit. "I don't pretend to judge the girl, Mr. Carter. I must say, though, that I'm always kind o' suspicious of these quiet people. I gener'ly find they turn out to be sly and deceitful."

Miss Palmer favoured her caller with an elaborate wink. "We'd tell her to get off the earth if we weren't afraid she couldn't go to heaven," she continued sorrowfully. "Oh, she's a terror! She stuck up for Nathan when ma jumped on him — and Nathan's an infidel, you know. We think all the infidels and their friends ought to be piled up in heaps and burned on Boston Common; don't you?"

It was not so easy for the young man to enjoy a joke that was constructed along these lines; yet he managed to achieve a smile. He was interested to know how Mrs. Palmer would treat it. But, before she had time to answer, "Do sit down, ma, and go to knittin' again!" her daughter cried; and she obediently sat down. "You can't clear up the room any more, now Mr. Carter's here, and it makes me nervous to see you

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spyin' out things. He didn't expect to find it lookin' like the show-window of a furniture-store, did you, Mr. Carter?"

"I wouldn't change anything here if I could," Carter affirmed. "It looks like a place that's lived in."

"Yes, Floss and I have had some good times here. Of course we've quarrelled more or less — oh, you needn't groan and shake your head, ma! It was 'most always my fault! But honestly I think it would be better for Floss if quarrellin' came easier to her. She's so tender-hearted she gets imposed on, sometimes. Now, take that fool Fairbanks. *I'd* called him down so he'd stayed called down; I'd told him if he ever spoke to me again I'd slap his face. But Floss had to let him beg her pardon, she was so afraid of hurtin' his feelin's, and then he went and sent her that stuff at Christmas-time—and I know it'll just make her sick at the stomach every time she thinks of it! Why don't you kill Fairbanks?"

"Sh-h-h!" Mrs. Palmer interrupted. "That don't sound Christian, Nettie! Besides, it ain't likely a man would give silver-plated brushes and combs and things to a girl that hadn't ever encouraged him."

"Oh, fudge, ma!" There was something

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fine, Carter thought, in the girl's disrespectful heat. "The man's cracked, that's what! If he was an all-around man he'd given her the things man-fashion, and then she'd known where she was and what to do. She believes he sent 'em, partly because of the way he keeps hintin', but she don't feel sure about it, so that she could spunk up and send 'em back; and she can't very well ask him any questions, can she? She's thrown the trash up on a top shelf and — But there! It makes me too mad to think about! Why can't you write a piece about noodles, Mr. Carter, and send Fairbanks a marked paper?"

"Wouldn't it be better still to put him in a novel?"

"Yes, do! Write a novel about Miles's, and put *me* in, too! Of course, though," she added wistfully, "that's a silly thing to say. Nothing ever happens at Miles's. I can't liven the place up, for all I've tried. Frank won't even teach me to play poker."

Mrs. Palmer's ball of yarn rolled on the carpet, under the influence of, it seemed, an impatient movement. She stooped to pick it up. Her face was hidden when she spoke, but her voice sufficiently showed her feelings. "I guess it'd be just as well for everybody if that young

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man didn't know how to do such things himself," she said.

"Oh, there's no harm in Mr. Scanlon," volunteered Carter; and Miss Palmer gave him a grateful glance and an emphatic nod.

"Frank's all right!" she asserted. "People don't put a chump in charge of a big printing-office and pay him twenty-five dollars a week — not in Boston, they don't. You'll find the chumps, some of 'em, in places like Merchant's, grinning all day like chessy-cats, and saying, 'Jelly-tumblers on the third floor; wash-boilers in the basement.' *They* don't play poker — but they don't cut any ice, either, when there are live men around. Anyway, I like a man to have some faults. I ain't perfect myself, and I feel more at home amongst the sinners!"

Mrs. Palmer stared reproachfully at her daughter over her spectacles, but contented herself with an indirect protest,—"I don't see why you should feel inclined to slur young men like that one from Merchant's that's called two or three times since you've been sick."

"Who, Willie Beals? Oh, Willie's the sweetest thing that ever happened! He's a floor-walker, too. Why would I quarrel with my bread and butter?"

She laughed, and looked at Carter, as though

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certain of comprehension and sympathy. Her mother was dumb ; and, seeing the woman thus reduced to helplessness, Carter gave way to a narrow and vicious desire to make her suppression absolute — as a sort of punishment for the uneasiness she had caused him. Perceiving that in her daughter's favour she was ready to relax the laws of conduct to which she held all other girls, he doubted whether any proposition which the daughter seconded could seriously disturb her ; yet he malevolently resolved to try. "What about that trip to Chinatown?" he asked, all at once.

"Chinatown?" the girl repeated. "When did you dream of it?"

"Have you forgotten that you spoke of going, that night at the theatre? I thought I'd suggest to Frank to take you and Miss Dow, some evening, after you get well."

"Good boy! I'll hurry up and get well," she cried delightedly. "You hear, ma? That's better than medicine."

"Prob'ly I've seen most o' the Chinamen at the Chinese Sunday-school," responded Mrs. Palmer, placidly. "I ain't any objection to your goin' to make 'em a kind of a neighbourly call. I s'pose it pleases the poor things to have white folks come to see 'em."

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"A dollar's worth," Miss Palmer commented, with a surreptitious grimace. "Will you put Chinatown in your novel, too?"

"Don't say anything about that novel, please. Don't even think of it again. It's only a fancy of mine, and I shouldn't have mentioned it. I'm afraid I'm not clever enough to undertake such a big thing."

Mrs. Palmer smiled at him kindly — so kindly that he almost repented his revengefulness. "There's nothin' like tryin'," she suggested. "I don't read novils, but I s'pose anybody might do worse things than write 'em. If you write about this place, and Mr. Fairbanks, as Nettie spoke of, I think you'd ought to tell folks how good the Mileses have been to him. It was two years ago he come here — from Bridgeport. It was in the winter, and he didn't have anywhere to stay or anything to eat, and you can tell how hard up he was — he didn't have any underclo'es. He run against Mr. Miles, somehow, and Mr. Miles brought him home and put him up, and he's give him work ever sence, when he had any himself. I know there's times when they hate to have him here, times when he gets to drinkin' and carousin', but then, as Mis' Miles says, it's a kind of a check-weight on him to be where he's known, and he'd be a good deal worse'n he is if he didn't have

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a place to go to. Mis' Miles and I don't agree about some things; she's a kind of a Speritu'list, you know; but I don't know as I'd feel to act so Christian towards the man if I was in her place, I don't really! Eat some of Mr. Carter's grapes, Nettie," she ended abruptly, with scarcely any change of accent. "You've been talkin' so much I notice you're gettin' hoarse."

"Now you've driven him away!" the girl said accusingly. "I'm not hoarse, am I, Mr. Carter? But must you go? I'm sorry. Come in some evening soon, with Floss, and I won't talk so much. I'll get her to tell about the funny things that happened when she was teaching school down East. You'll just die!"

She showed, plainly enough, that she really wanted him to come again; and on the strength of that assurance Carter promised to do so, and made his escape. He congratulated himself that the call had accomplished everything he designed. He knew all that the Palmer woman could urge against Miss Dow, which was practically nothing at all. He felt that, now he understood the Palmer woman, he could afford to laugh at and disregard her — all the more since he had the good will of her daughter. Jealousy at second hand was truly matter for laughter; not reason for anger, not even excuse for scorn!

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He had started towards his room, as he meditated these things ; but some trivial errand took him back, and across the hall, to Mrs. Miles's kitchen. The door stood ajar, and the place was empty ; and while he waited a moment, thinking of the Palmers and questioning whether it was worth while to hunt for Mrs. Miles, voices in the lower hall caught his attention and he absently stepped forward and glanced down the stairway. It seemed that Katie, the girl, was one of those below. She heard the movement and looked up at him. " Mr. Holl hasn't come in, has he, Mr. Carter ? " she asked.

" I think not."

" Mr. Holl's friend will do quite as well." This was another voice. " I won't trouble you any further, young woman. I'll just go up and speak to Mr. Carter." The stranger had gained the head of the stairs by this time. " I must sit down," he said urgently.

Perhaps it was only Carter's fancy that Katie received this with a contemptuous snort. At any rate, he led the stranger into the parlour, and lighted the gas. Then he gazed curiously at a gaunt old man who somehow suggested a clergyman turned tramp, broken in body and spirit by poverty and ill usage. He wore no overcoat ; the collar of his shabby frock was pulled up and

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pinned at the neck. His face, stubbled with greyish beard, was patched with purple bruises and unhealed wounds. The wavering gleam of his sunken eyes and the tremor of his hands told of shattered nerves. Clearly it cost him an effort to sit still. In spite of all, there was something precise and almost dictatorial in his manner; it was that of one who has gloried in his own gifts.

"I had been hoping to go to Montreal, to converse with the Rev. O. Howard Noyes," he began, "some years ago the contributor of a masterly essay on 'Our Ethical Base,' to the *Nationalist Magazine*. I was disappointed. Yesterday I learned that he was staying for a few days at Marblehead, and I visited him. Also I was so foolish as to drink too much beer."

Carter drew back a little, and stared in amazement at the stranger. But the stranger seemed quite unaware that he had said anything out of the common. He took a fresh grip of the arms of his chair, and went evenly on:

"I sat down on a doorstep and fell asleep. A policeman brutally assaulted me, and threw me over a fence. The judge, this morning, was on the point of sending me to the Island. He would have sent me to the Island, but I pleaded with him. I pleaded. He let me go on condition

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that I would leave town. Now, what am I to do?"

Apparently this was the end. He laid his forefingers together, sighed gently, and looked at Carter with the complacency of a man who feels that he has made out his case. It was charitable to assume that he was not altogether sane. It was certain that he needed liquor to save him from absolute collapse. Convinced that the experience was worth the money, Carter silently handed him a half dollar. As silently he took it and shuffled away. Significant, as showing the emotions he had roused in one gentle breast, was the fact that Katie narrowly watched his progress down the stairway, past the hat-rack, through the door. "Go to Jericho, you nasty old bum!" Carter heard her mutter as she returned to her kitchen.

The object of the stranger's delicate attention did not echo her unkindness. He regarded the man with something of that contemptuous superiority which flourishes best, perhaps, in the minds of those who have nothing to be proud of but sobriety; yet he did not wish him ill. For that matter, Carter had no desire in the premises, nor any plan, except a literary one. The incident, as it stood, was perfect, and he made elaborate notes of it, and promised himself much joy

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in their future use. But it is possible that he would never have spoken of it had he not, that evening, while it was still fresh in his mind, encountered Holl at the foot of the stairs. Then it seemed natural to speak; and he intended to be neither ill natured nor unkind.

"Had the honour of passing as a friend of yours this afternoon," Carter began, with a reminiscent chuckle.

"So? How's that?" Holl was carrying some bundles of kindling-wood. He shifted them into the hollow of his arm and rested his elbow on the baluster.

"Caller asked for you, but came up to see me, when he happened to hear my name. He felt as though anybody would do — any old thing that could be touched."

"Who was it?"

"By Jove, I never thought of it till this minute! He didn't mention his name. Tall man; very thin; iron-grey mustache; knobby forehead; deep-set grey eyes; long nose; only two front teeth in his lower jaw. It wouldn't have surprised me to see him in a pulpit — with a bottle; or in a bar-room — leading the gang in prayer."

"It must have been poor Stackpole," Holl said thoughtfully. "He wasn't a minister; he

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used to be a lawyer. How much did you give him?"

"Oh, that's all right. I got my money's worth."

"But I'd like to know."

"Well, I gave him half a dollar."

Deliberately Holl laid his kindling-wood at the foot of the stairway. In the business-like fashion of a man who does a normal and necessary deed, he extracted a coin from his pocket and held it out. But Carter waved him off. "Why, that's absurd!" he cried. The act amused him, but it angered him a little, also. "It was on my own motion that I gave the money to the poor old ghost. You're not responsible. To tell you the truth, I'm mighty glad I met him. He operated me by a new method, you see. I think I'll put him in a story."

"You don't mean that?" Holl seemed both shocked and surprised. It vexed Carter that he should be so; more than a trace of irritation was in his voice when he demanded in his turn, "Well, why not?"

"Well, I think misfortune had ought to be respected. That's why. The man we're speakin' of was a better man than either of us once. If he's goin' to hell now, that's no reason why you should send him goin' faster, by humiliatin' him

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in public. Better take back the fifty 'n' call it square." He tendered the coin once more.

Loud talk or vigorous action might have lifted the burden from Carter's spirit. Considerations of the time and the place withheld him from these; and for the moment he could only stare at Holl defiantly and await that quiet but crushing rejoinder which evaded his tongue. Holl watched him, and at the end of the moment was first to speak.

"Then," Holl pronounced conclusively, "I think you'll be doin' a dirty trick!"

He stooped to take up his bundles. The movement broke the spell under which Carter felt himself labouring. A latch-key rattled in the door; he did not even turn his head to see who came. He mouthed and choked over his words; but that was because rage clogged his tongue with bitter sayings.

"Damn your money!" he said. "And damn your impudence! Do you think, you insignificant little squirt, that you can dictate" —

"Ah! What have we here?" somebody interrupted. It was Jenks who had entered. He spoke abruptly enough to gain the attention of both. Then he smiled cheerfully from one to the other. "Rehearsing a realistic episode from the new novel?" he asked. "I'm sorry to stand

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in the way of it, but I need Nathan's advice on certain matters of general importance, — and I need it *now*. Come along, my son ! ”

He linked his arm in Holl's, and drew him towards the stairs. Holl did not resist. He looked rather grieved and disappointed than angry, Carter fancied. “ You'll think better of this,” Holl said as he turned away.

He had laid the fifty-cent piece on the head of the baluster and left it there, and for an instant Carter longed to throw it after him. He checked that undignified impulse, and the wish to yell a final malediction, and, recalling the errand he had started out to do, he flung into the street. Under the silence of the stars his passion moderated. He reflected that the pursuit of Art is inevitably attended with difficulties, and that the greater the artist the more certain he is to miss contemporary appreciation. He told himself that others had had to contend with ignorance, even with malice. He sympathized with all such, near or distant. But he felt justified in reserving his fullest sympathy for himself, a man grievously misunderstood.

XI

IT was natural to rail against the fate that discouraged him from creating a masterpiece but made it easy to abet a nuisance; and when Carter recalled Jenks's scepticism, Miss Dow's distrust, and Holl's opposition, contrasting them with the enthusiasm that promoted all his plans for Vitalline, he was nearly ready to refuse to be famous. Howsoever genuine his vocation might have been, he would have found it hard, just at this time, to reconcile the claims of literature and patent medicine; for Gibbs, the junior member of the firm that employed him, had inherited money, and was cheerfully anxious to make business boom. The advisability of putting forward Vitalline as a "spring medicine" had occasionally been debated. Now the discussion raged day and night; and Carter, who approved the proposition, laid aside his novel and brought all his powers to bear upon the sordid argument. Murdoch, the dissident, at length professed himself converted. Then there were new and extensive advertising contracts to be made, and it was necessary to act promptly. When Carter reached Exmouth, one Wednesday morning, he found it already decided that he

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and Gibbs were to go to New York on the one-o'clock train.

Since Gibbs put much money in his purse and took his new cheque-book along, Carter surmised that he had an eye to pleasure as well as business; and so it proved. Abstinent at home, he was ready for any orgy when abroad; and though he faithfully stuck to business in the daytime, the end of office-hours was a welcome signal for excursions in the Tenderloin. Always he was urgent that Carter accompany him. The young man went: at first because he was curious about the night life of the great, restless, over-burdened, hollow-hearted city; later because he realised that it was easier to stay with Gibbs and guard him from being robbed, beaten, or arrested, than it might be to stand aloof, and ultimately extract him from Bellevue or Blackwell's island. And after he perceived his usefulness a sentiment of duty helped to hold Carter to the task — even at the cost of a bedrabbled memory and an infected fancy. Happily Gibbs valued his immoral support, and in his wildest moods was not intractable; but, even so, the experience was one to hasten grey hairs.

Between these busy days and lurid nights there were moments when Vitalline and champagne were alike a burden, and when, revolting

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from the thought of painted faces and raucous voices, Carter summoned up a grateful vision of the girl in Boston. He had persuaded himself that, since he had been forced to leave without saying good-by, he ought to account for the circumstance. Therefore he wrote her a careful note — much of a masterpiece, in its way, since it was neither too familiar nor too formal. But almost as soon as it was mailed he began to regret that he did not inspire it with the tenderness which he was sure he felt. Had the girl replied, giving him an excuse to write again, Carter's second letter would have been as torrid and volcanic as his nature permitted. His imagination, unfettered by the presence of the favoured object, was perpetually spurred by the contrast between Miss Dow and the girls of the concert-halls; and though his mental pictures of her were inevitably coloured by the scenes he was witnessing, it is only fair to add that they always idealised her character as well as her person. She embodied Perfection, he told himself rapturously. It was worth while to go away from her — once — merely to learn that he could not live without her.

Yet when the ten days were over, and he and Gibbs took the train for home, Carter watched himself a little apprehensively. He had been

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possessed by passions — not for women — before, and when the time came to act upon them they had somehow evaporated. As he drew nearer Boston, and found himself still longing and looking forward, doubt of his own resolution abated. Then he began to plan irrevocable action. Gibbs dropped off the train at Exmouth, prepared to explain to Mrs. Gibbs that his dilapidated condition was due to an attack of dysentery, brought on by change of water. Carter, reaching the city, turned over his bag to the transfer agent, and made straight for Merchant's.

It was a clear, bright, electric afternoon; but in the big shop the air seemed deadened with heat and burdened with stifling odours. Women charged fiercely through it, alert for bargains and courageous to struggle with the guardians of the treasures; but a mere man felt himself at a disadvantage. The languid unconcern with which most of the clerks viewed him tended to depress his head and hamper his gait: they who offered the overt insult were women, and he could not meet them with commanding arrogance, as other women did. Physically and spiritually, Carter was limp when he reached the glove counter; but it braced him only to look at the girl he had come to see. He ceased

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to fear the others; nay, he forgot them, as he raised his hat and put out his hand. "Say you're glad to see me!" he demanded in an undertone.

"Why, of course I am," Miss Dow responded consciously. "I—I hope you've had a pleasant time."

"This is the pleasantest part of it. That's why I started for here the minute the train got in. Do you know, I was thinking on the way over that I'd ask you and the others—Miss Palmer and Mr. Scanlon—to celebrate my return to-night. Will you go to the theatre with me? And after the show we'll run down to Chinatown for something to eat."

Miss Dow considered a moment. "I will, if Nettie will," she said finally.

"That'll be all right, then. Will you speak to her about it, on the way home? I suppose she's well and at work again, isn't she? That's nice! Now I'll go over to the *Star* office and tell Frank about the scheme. I don't dare to detain you any longer—but I'd like to stand here and look at you the rest of the afternoon. Good-by till to-night!"

Then he went out unfalteringly, with his head up, gazing, level eyed, at impetuous shoppers, scornful saleswomen, and the dapper little men

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who mediated between them. He was resolved and content, and he cared for none of these things. He hurried over to the *Star* office and sent up to Scanlon a pencilled note which presently came back to him inscribed "O.K.;" and then he caught a South End car and rode down to Miles's. "Home" was the name his thoughts gave it. It looked like home to see Alfred standing on the doorsteps; and Carter put his arm around the boy's shoulder and dropped a dime in his hand. "What's the news, Alfred?" he cried gayly.

"Your bag's come. Shakespeare's all bunged up. He slipped and sprained his ankle, so's he can't hardly walk. Mr. Miles and George and father are all loafin'—leastways, they're only jobbin' 'round. Mr. Miles says he be damn if he ever see it so dull. Katie dropped the flat-iron on her foot. She can't get her shoe on. There was two men here after you last Sunday—a big fat one and a little fat one. They're comin' again to-morrow. I guess that's all—except I busted my little steam-engine," the boy gloomily concluded.

"You did, eh? Too bad! We'll have to see about that," Carter promised. He was glad he had met the lad and learned certain things. It occurred to him that, since Jenks was in the

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house, it might be well to spend an hour in trying to chat, perfecting his own knowledge of a character he meant to introduce to immortality. Nevertheless, when it came to the point, he was shy of the experiment. He dawdled on the second floor, making conversation with Mrs. Miles and Mrs. Palmer, until the very thinness of it shamed him away. When he discovered some delayed letters that called for prompt attention he welcomed the excuse to avoid a meeting with the keen old man in the attic; he buried himself in his correspondence, lavishing ink like a cuttle-fish and with much the same motive. In the end, he found he had left himself barely time enough to get supper and prepare for his theatre party.

That impromptu festival went off as prosperously as he could have hoped. It was a melodrama that they four witnessed, a thing of scenery and spasms — adapted to all tastes, notwithstanding, since one who could not sympathise found abundant reason to laugh. And after the curtain had fallen and they had come into the starlight it appeared to prelude a wilder drama that they should turn down Essex street. Except for a furtive woman or two, and a party of roysterers in progress from one saloon to another, it was a solitary spot, near as it was

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to the city's heart; and the dark, deserted buildings on either hand made it seem even sombre. That curious sense of expectancy, almost foreboding, which comes to one who walks a quiet city street at night took possession of all. Miss Palmer peered into every doorway; and Carter noticed that, as they reached the end of the block and came under a light, the pressure of Miss Dow's hand upon his arm perceptibly relaxed — though she started, and tightened her hold again, when Scanlon spoke up suddenly. "Ah, there, Jack!" he cried.

"How goes it, Frank, old boy!" a policeman answered. Emerging from the shadow, he grinned at Scanlon and cast an amused and tolerant glance towards Miss Palmer and Miss Dow. Then at a second glance his expression altered, and he soberly put his hand to his helmet. "Anything I can do for you?" he asked.

"Ladies, this is my friend Officer Jackson," Scanlon said. "You see, Jack," he added, "they think they'd like to take a look at Chinatown, so my chum and I — Mr. Carter, Officer Jackson — are doin' the honors. I s'pose the Asiatic is in the same old place, ain't it?"

"Oh, sure!" In a matter-of-course way the officer set off up Harrison avenue, walking with

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that sedate, assured, flat-footed tread which policemen cultivate. He kept a little in advance and seemed to constitute himself both escort and protector. "You know you're early, Frank," he said over his shoulder. "Don't find many of the rounders here much before midnight."

"That's all right. The Asiatic is worth the price of admission, any time."

The officer laughed and led them, under a red lantern, up a short, steep stairway so narrow two could scarcely walk abreast. It gave upon an equally contracted landing; and this admitted to a room that, when all the seats at all the tables were occupied, might have accommodated some thirty or forty persons. Now only a dozen were present and they were grouped around a scrofulous youth who had braced himself against a table and was haranguing a calm and smiling young man at the next. The policeman's yellow mustache bristled at the sight; he walked forward and whirled the boy in the direction of the door. "You go home and go to bed," he commanded, "or I'll run you in."

"I ain't doin' nothin'."

"Go on, now! Runts like you, swellin' round, full of bad rum. Get along!" He

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watched the fellow down the stairs and, returning, scowled about him professionally. Then since all were silent, suitably impressed, he condescended to smile again; and Miss Palmer met his friendlier eye.

"Probably the little man thinks he's seein' life," she suggested charitably.

"Oh, yes. Chinatown catches lots of 'em. Imitation sports; nursin'-bottle toughs. When they get a chance to hit the pipe, smoke opium, you know, they think they're doin' somethin' real cunnin'. They give me a pain, that kind does. Say, Wong, where's Willie?" he turned to ask a fat Chinaman who had been hovering anxiously near.

"He upstairs. You want me call?"

"No, I guess not. Better go up, hadn't you, Frank? You'll be more by yourselves, like. You c'n see all there is here, mighty quick: chairs 'n' tables, counter with a dumb-waiter behind it, people eatin' chop-suey, and the cashier in a cage. *That's* business, eh?"

"Where's the kitchen?" Miss Palmer asked.

"Upstairs, too."

"Let's go, then."

Here also the officer seemed to take it for granted that he should lead the way; and he preceded them up a shorter, narrower flight

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which terminated at the kitchen's very door. The kitchen was a clean and odourless place, but so crowded with barrels and boxes, not to mention busy men in blouses, that it seemed a criminal deed to infringe on the space and the air; and they went on into a front room filled with square stools and lacquer tables and guarded by a red and yellow joss. A slim little Chinaman, dressed in ill-fitting "American clothes," came smilingly forward.

"How are you to-night, Willie?" Scanlon said. "Chipper as ever? Good enough! Bring us some chop-suey and tea, with chop-sticks on the side. Sit down and eat with us, Jack?" Then, as the policeman shook his head in a manner that conveyed both thanks and regret, Scanlon added, "What's the news around here, anyhow?"

"Oh, nothin' much. Same old story. But say, I've seen that tall, slab-sided feller that boards up at your place, a number of times lately. What's his name? Fairbanks? Bad sign for him to be hangin' 'round this neighbourhood, ain't it?"

"Well, it's clear gain to the rest of the town, and that's no dream. Eh, Carter? I'll give the devil his due, though, he ain't had much work this fortnight or so, and I s'pose he has to stay somewhere. Pour out the tea for us, Willie," he

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directed next moment, as the proprietor and another came with their food and drink. "Don't seem as though I ever could strike that combination. Now, children," he added, as he dipped a spoon into the platter, "you're goin' to eat somethin' you'll remember as long as you live!"

The officer was watching with an interest that seemed not wholly benevolent; and from the stringy mass upon her plate, suggestive of hash stewed in molasses, Miss Palmer glanced suspiciously towards the Chinaman. "What's it made of?" she asked.

"Oh, pork and chicken-livers and sprouts — and sings."

"Mostly 'things,'" added Scanlon. "Show your sportin' blood, now; swallow some."

"Why, it's good!" Miss Palmer cried, with an accent of surprise. "Don't you like it, Floss?"

"Pretty well."

"It's economical, too," the policeman commented. "Sometimes I tell my wife I'm going to feed her on it. Eat a dish of it to-night, you c'n taste it all next week. Well, I must be takin' a walk around the block. You ought to bring your lady friends down here in the daytime, Frank, and show 'em the joss-house across the street, and the Chinatown daily paper on the brick wall in the alley." He raised his helmet.

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"Good evenin', ladies," he said as he backed away. "Pleased to meet you, Mr. Carter. See you later, Frank."

"So long, Jack!" Scanlon answered. He took up the chop-sticks that the Chinaman had left and offered a pair to Miss Dow. "Let's see you eat with 'em," he challenged; but she would not experiment. As for Miss Palmer, after she had learned to hold them she laid them aside and resorted to her fork again. "Too slow," she grimaced.

"That's the way you want to go with this stuff, when you're not used to it," Scanlon advised anxiously. "It's rich food, you know; liable to have fun with you, if you eat too much."

"How much does it cost?" was the girl's saucy rejoinder.

"Oh, you can't break me! That ain't what I'm afraid of. It'll be about a half a dollar for this lay-out, I guess. How's that, Willie?"

"That's enough — for you."

"Why, I don't see how he can sell things so cheap! I should think he'd lose money."

"He don't care, as long as he knows he's in business. Do you, Willie?"

The joke must have been almost too complex for the Chinaman's apprehension; but he grinned at it loyally. Scanlon was evidently known and

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held in favour. While the women trifled with the food or studied the dingy little room or looked down into the wide, white, unfamiliar street, the men chatted of old times and common friends. It may have been these signs of a perfect understanding that prompted Miss Palmer to say suddenly, "Ask him where we can go to see somebody smoke opium."

"I'll show you an opium pipe," the Chinaman volunteered, with a sympathetic smile. He did so; and before she had ceased to wonder over that he produced a can that held a spoonful of the drug, and demonstrated how the smokers "cook" it. Carter had a notion that Scanlon was not quite at ease while this explication was in progress--that he was fearful that Miss Palmer might propose to smoke. At least he seemed relieved when the pipe and can were put away. Blithely he ordered more tea. While the friends drank it they watched the new arrivals.

As midnight approached, the room had filled. It was a composite gathering of persons who, with few exceptions, appeared accustomed to the place and wholly incurious about each other. They had mastered that enlightened selfishness which crowns the character of the cosmopolite and makes him equally indifferent to a comic

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song or a confession of murder — when it does not assist the business in hand. Therefore they had no eyes for the vicious-looking young Chinaman who, though queueless and dressed in a frock coat and derby hat, anomalously used chop-sticks to eat his rice. Neither did they heed the yellow-haired woman who demanded a fork *and* knife with her chop-suey, and who, while she ate, kept a cigarette alight. Had they noticed her they would have pronounced her harmless, since she attended strictly to her food and her bemuddled escort; and in herself she was so. But Miss Palmer viewed her with an aggressive scorn that threatened complications if she of the cigarette chanced to look around. A heavy load was lifted from Carter's mind when Scanlon saw the danger and led a swift and masterly retreat.

It was pleasant to be out in the air again, so pleasant that the very thought of street-cars seemed to profane the lustrous night. As with one consent, they started up Harrison avenue, instead of turning towards Washington street. Scanlon and Miss Palmer struck out a lively pace, and were soon a block in advance; and Carter let them go. So far as he was concerned it had been a silent evening; he had lived through his eyes and in his thoughts; and,

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though there was much that he wanted to say, his general habit of unreadiness had been so strengthened by these observant hours that he had almost dreaded the homeward road and Miss Palmer's loosened tongue. He took it as a happy omen that Miss Dow shared his mood; it persuaded him that she was thinking his thoughts also. Thus it came as a somewhat unwelcome surprise when she asked abruptly, "What was the name of that Chinaman who keeps the restaurant?"

"Oh, I don't know," he answered slightly. "Lee Ding Dong, or something that sounds like it. It's a very pretty name — of its kind; but I really don't remember it."

"How few people have pretty names," she mused. "Neither of us has much to brag of. Now, mine — I don't like it at all. 'Dow'! It sounds as though somebody cut it off with an axe. 'Carter' isn't very romantic, either, though I like the 'Maurice.' What's your middle name?"

"I haven't any. I never blamed my parents, though. They had no means of knowing that I'd turn out a literary man."

"N — no," she agreed; but the tone showed that she did not quite understand. She covered her perplexity by going on briskly: "I'm glad

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you've reminded me; I wanted to ask you if you're writing any stories, or anything — now."

She might have wished to learn whether he still cherished his plan of a novel; or she might have spoken out of friendly interest, with no ulterior purpose. Whatsoever the fact, the form of the question favoured him. He congratulated himself that he could answer truthfully and still keep something back.

"I'm not writing anything but advertisements," he said. "I belong to the labouring class, you know, and when my esteemed employers ask for all my time, why, they have to get it. And then again," he was inspired to add, "the last thing I wrote was so flat a failure that it disheartened me."

"Why, how was that? What was it?"

"The letter I sent you from New York. Why didn't you answer it?"

"Well, I" — She hesitated, as though she wanted to choose her words. "I know it wasn't very civil to neglect it," she confessed at length, "but I didn't seem to have anything to say."

"I had. If you'd given me any encouragement I should have written again, for I thought of you a good deal while I was away; and if I had written again it would have been to tell you that I love you."

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He spoke with a calmness that surprised himself. He had always pictured such an avowal as made in a secluded spot, at a passionate moment, and couched in burning words, assisted by impressive action; yet here were they on the open street; conspicuous had any been there to see; walking in all sobriety, and talking with unmodulated voices. Nor did her acts corroborate his dreams — for she neither blushed nor trembled nor cried out. She only glanced at him swiftly and then looked away.

“Well?” he suggested.

“I’m sorry you said it — now,” she said.

They had come to the place where, on a certain Sunday evening, a few weeks earlier, he had encountered that other girl. A polluting recollection crossed his mind as he turned to reply. It strengthened his design with baser arguments; and these, though he did not will it so, influenced his manner. He looked at his companion long and gloatingly — with a look from which she instinctively shrunk. His tone was that of one who has exercised mastery, and it hinted a confidence that, the girl must have reflected, she had given him no reason to feel.

“I’m sorry, too,” he agreed. “It would be pleasanter, all around, if we lived on Beacon street, and I could whisper it to you, some even-

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ing, in the conservatory. But we don't; and there's no such bower at Miles's—and no 'Lovers' Lane' anywhere near the South End. I have to improve my chance, you see, even on Harrison avenue. You ought to realise that if I can love you *here*"—he waved his hand disparagingly around—"it proves that I love you devotedly. I do. And I believe you care for me a little, Florence Dow. Don't you?"

She did not answer. "Well?" he suggested again. She flashed a look of resentment, but he met it with disarming humility. "*I am* impatient," he admitted; "I can't help it. And you"—

"I like you, certainly," she said slowly; "but I don't know whether I love you or not. I don't believe *you* know whether you love me or whether this is something that just—happened! That's why I didn't want you to speak of it until we both found out. It wasn't the place I was thinking of; I suppose the men and women on Harrison avenue are human beings, like others. And now"—there was a note of distress in her vehement voice—"I shall feel just—just horrid every time I see you. I shall be thinking about it, and wondering." He caught the glimmer of tears in her eyes. "I don't want you to say anything more for a—oh, not for a month, anyhow! Will you?"

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"Well, I suppose I can try," Carter conceded. "You mustn't expect me to apologise for to-night, though."

"Now, I'll be angry if you talk that way. Of course I know you've paid me a compliment. I can thank you for that, even while I'm sorry. I wonder," she went on in a sort of soliloquy, "I wonder whether you'd be satisfied, your life long, if you married a shop-girl, a girl who lived at Miles's? Oh, I'm not admitting that I'm your inferior, mind,—I don't think I am; but you think so. Yes, you do. And you'd always remember that you found your wife in the lodging-house you went to because you were short of money — one of the common folks that you thought were only good enough to put into stories. And if you ever became famous I'm afraid you'd be ashamed of her."

"Upon my word, Miss Dow, you make me out an amazing snob!"

"No," she said quickly, "I don't think it's quite *that*. I know I can't make you understand, though, — until I think it all over. Let's not talk about it any more. Tell me all about New York, and what you saw and did."

Apathetically, not to say grumpily, he responded; but she would not be put off. Presently he found himself skirting the allowable,

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and dodging the impossible, and giving an expurgated version of his experiences. It was good practice for literature, thus to select details and embroider incidents, and soon he began to enjoy the game. His lover-like fancies fell into abeyance — only reviving as they approached Miles's corner, where Scanlon and his lady still lingered. It seemed that Scanlon had been disappointed of a kiss. "You're a nice, generous girl, I don't think!" they heard him say disconsolately, as they drew near. And when Miss Dow forsook him, almost without a word, and ran upstairs, Carter wrathfully avowed that she was — another.

XII

THAT notwithstanding, his waking thoughts were kind. Reviewing events while he smoked his Sunday-morning pipe, he charitably concluded that it was not impatience of him, but distrust of her own self-control which prompted Miss Dow to a summary leave-taking. Therefore he would not blame her; but he was ready to quarrel with himself for failing to appoint another meeting. He wondered whether, later on, he might rap at her door and invite her to go to church with him. Then he dismissed the idea. Since she was in an undecided temper and not quite at ease in his company, it would be wise and generous to affect to leave her to herself. Their next encounter should seem to be the outcome of chance.

He intended, of course, to assist Fate; and when he came back from his Klondike breakfast he left his door a little ajar, that he might overlook hers. But his plan failed. Either she had slipped out and back again during his absence or she had determined to go hungry and remain invisible. He exchanged greetings with Scanlon, Nichols, Alfred, and Katie, and he squandered a superfluous scowl on Holl—who nodded as amiably as though they two were blood

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brothers. That was the net result of his watchfulness. And presently the strain of expectation began to weigh upon his nerves. He grew impatient, then irritable, finally reckless. He slammed the door and took up his neglected novel.

It was not possible at once to resume the mood in which he had wrought; and he had no such base of conviction that enables a man to "swear by" his past achievements; so he read with a distaste that momentarily strengthened. Viewing it as a whole, now that his original impulse had cooled, he thought he perceived that the work lacked symmetry, unity, method. Irrelevant episodes were obtruded; essential incidents had not been set in logical sequence; even the style showed variations — from the compact to the loose and exclamatory. Recalling the ardour with which he had toiled, Carter could have wept over the inchoate mass. He puzzled a long time on the problem of its betterment. Especially he lingered at certain passages inculcating a philosophy which he felt to be profound: they alone made the novel worth saving. Yet even whilst he gloried in these, he realised that his perplexity went deeper than technicalities. Its root was in the fact that his understanding of life and his views of human nature

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had sustained a change. He could not now — in spite of his love he could not — repeat or endorse the rhapsodies he had indulged in, over the character of his heroine, only three weeks before. The girl was sound enough, morally and mentally, and this was still a thing to emphasise. But now that he was really getting to know women, he told himself, he should certainly make it appear that circumstances had favoured her and that she was by no means typical of womankind.

It was delightful to pose, though only in fancy, as instructor of the universe, and he maintained the attitude until it suddenly occurred to him that it might not be quite politic thus to discredit a sex. He remembered that the busy American reads by proxy, leaving it to his wives and daughters to choose his literary idols; and that, naturally enough, the women of American fiction tend to fall into two classes — that of the spineless sentimentalist, and that of the stiff young person with insolent, drooping eyelids and masterful mouth, who wears her head on the back of her neck and drags her dog and her lover by the one chain. There was slight encouragement in the thought that Mr. Howells had ventured to depict a third variety of woman, the hen-minded; for Mr. Howells, being

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the master, could do deeds that would not be tolerated in an apprentice. And not even he had had the temerity to set forth a hopeless fool or an irreclaimable drab — much less to suggest that women in general were akin to these. All things considered, it seemed to Carter that if he applied his theory of art to his newly acquired knowledge of life he would seriously endanger that success which a wise man should covet. Either to condemn his theory, or suppress his facts, or forego his success, was the stringent necessity that appeared to be laid upon him.

It was a large question ; he wanted to assist his intellect with a drink ; but he found no brandy bottle in his closet, though he could have sworn he left one there when he went to New York. Lacking that inspiration, he walked up and down and gnawed a cigar. If it was difficult to reach a conclusion it was still possible to rejoice that he had the documents — that he knew the feminine nature to its depths. Literature aside, he was glad he had come to his masculine inheritance before he definitely bound himself to one woman. It ensured him against those sudden disenchantments which stupefy or madden. He would be the better husband to Floss since, being prepared for her moods, he would know when to be gentle ; and she would be the better wife

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when once she perceived that he comprehended her.

Starting from this, he began to dramatise their future. He imagined various situations in which his wise, satiric smile — unconsciously he practised it, as the scenes rose before him — would restrain her from rashness or convict her of error. Growing more proficient at the exercise the longer he continued it, he increased the number of his characters and complicated their transactions, just for the joy of prefiguring his own triumphs. Scanlon went down the hall singing, "Mr. Johnson, Turn Me Loose;" and at the very moment Carter entered — mentally — upon a career of social conquest that made Mrs. Carter the acknowledged leader of a whole neighbourhood. He paused to pride himself upon the fact that his experience and his intuition were unselfishly devoted to *her* elevation. How tenderly she should love him! he reflected. The whole dream was so vividly real that, when some one knocked at his door, it took him a minute or two to realise that the person who sought admission was not a worshipful wife, anxious to meet her lord and master.

He stood up and shook himself awake, and opened the door. Two *Ledger* reporters, old associates, were there — "Dicky" West, a

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chubby little man with a face expressive of nothing but innocence; and "Tad" Berkeley, who was tall, ferociously red-haired, and flabbily fat, and whose manner suggested a constant effort to minimize the fact of his bulk, — or his sex. It proved that they two were cherishing the design that, once at least in his lifetime, temporarily addles the brain of every Boston writer: they wanted to get up a "Boston Book" of prose and verse, descriptive, laudatory, and intensely local. West borrowed a pipe and smoked in silence, staring from one to the other, while Berkeley laid his hand caressingly on Carter's arm and unmasked all his fascinations of eye and voice. An essay to be entitled, "Out of Doors at the South End," was included in their plan. "And I give you my word, my dear fellow," said Berkeley, "I know of no one so competent to write it as yourself. A man of letters who has studied these people at home — why, the very coming here proved your genius! Of course, you can touch perfection, if you only will. Positively we haven't even thought of anybody else."

"But Murray has always lived at the South End," Carter suggested. He was more flattered than tempted. The undertaking promised to involve much work and little money.

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"Ah, but Murray was born and has always lived in the same house, his own house, a *whole* house," Berkeley answered, with intricate and artful emphasis. "There are class distinctions, even in this quarter, and I fancy Murray has persistently ignored all but the whole-house people. You understand? It's a subject for an essay in itself, really! Fancy the emotions of a conservative property-holder who lives to see a sign, 'Furnished Rooms' or 'Table Board,' in every *other* window on his street! You couldn't expect him to *know* the invaders. It's highly improbable that Murray is acquainted with the apartment-house people and the lodging-house people. Yet those are the true South End types — aren't they?"

"Um-m-m; very likely," Carter warily assented.

"And you've been observing them, night and day, for three or four months. Just fancy, Dicky, what stores of material he must have accumulated! You know, Carter, we don't ask you to violate the great novel you're probably writing; but two or three thousand words, — sidewalk sketches, — showing how the — the populace goes to work and comes back, and how it amuses itself, and — and so on; it won't rob you to write them, it'll only freshen your impressions

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so that you can make better use of them elsewhere. And it'll introduce your name to nice people," Berkeley concluded impressively. "I've already placed a hundred copies of the book at the Back Bay."

"Well — if I find that I can do anything for you I will," Carter agreed. He carefully refrained from manifesting enthusiasm; yet Berkeley greeted the ungracious words with loud acclaim.

"What did I tell you, Dicky?" he cried. "Didn't I say Carter was the most generous of all good fellows? We'll try to repay you, Carter; we will, truly! And now," he added briskly, "we must talk business, so that you may know just what we expect to accomplish." But even as he spoke he rushed over to the window and peered into the street. "There's a sweet creature on the corner!" he proclaimed. "How I'd like to escort her to a Symphony rehearsal! Don't you find it awfully amusing here, Carter? When are you coming back? — to Chestnut street, I mean. I'll wager, Dicky, he's fallen in love down here, and that's why he stays so long. What's her name, Carter? Katie, or Maudie, or Maggie, or Nellie? South End names always end with 'ie,' don't they? Isn't it curious?"

He smiled impartially on his companions,

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fanned himself with his handkerchief, and skipped to the other window. It was hard to believe the man was nervous; it seemed, rather, that he strove to demonstrate he was not fat; and, though his kittenish movements made the floor creak, it was impossible, to a philosophic mind, to watch him and withhold a certain sympathy. Carter had almost reached the point of admiring his pluck, when Berkeley's evil genius prompted him to provoke less friendly feelings. "Why don't you show us the natives, old fellow?" Berkeley demanded suddenly.

"What?"

"Trot out the untamed denizens of the jungle!" He advanced with dramatic swiftness to the door, and threw it open. "Lure some lodgers in, as they go by.

" ' I want to be a lodger,
And with the lodgers stand,
A folding-bed beside me,
A meal-ticket in my hand! ' "

Give me an opportunity to be one with them, if not of them."

"Oh, rubber-neck!" West muttered. "You keep on getting gay and you'll have your damned head knocked off!"

He had hushed his voice to a whisper, almost,

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and he looked towards the hall as though he feared the coming of some righteously indignant person who would slay him also. But Berkeley turned a chair to front the doorway, and put on an exaggerated air of anticipation and welcome. Carter had risen; his first thought had been to close the door; but on second thought he was not so sure that he wanted to do it. What if Miss Dow did chance to pass? These fellows would have no reason to suppose he was especially interested. And, indeed, even at the risk of temporary embarrassment, it would be worth while to learn how she impressed unprejudiced observers. He would leave the matter to luck, he decided, as he heard the street door opened and shut. He hardly knew whether to feel relieved or sorry, when the tap of a cane and the sound of familiar voices advised him that Jenks and Scanlon were coming up together. But he went forward, and spoke to them as they turned at the landing.

"Come in," he said. "I'd like you to meet these friends of mine. Mr. Jenks, Mr. Berkeley and Mr. West. Mr. Scanlon, gentlemen. Oh, you're acquainted with Mr. West, are you, Frank? That's pleasant! I haven't seen you since I got back, Mr. Jenks. I hope the sprain is doing well."

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"So-so," Jenks grumbled.

"Is it a sprained ankle?" Berkeley put in eagerly. Jenks nodded. "That's really a serious injury. You should be very careful, Mr. Jenks. I distinctly recall the time when one of our maids sprained hers. She was practically the mistress for a month, poor thing! Quite a superior person, you understand, faithful and intelligent and all that, and we couldn't bring ourselves to send her to the hospital. What inconvenience people will cause themselves for the sake of a sentiment, won't they?" Jenks nodded again. "Are you applying hot water?"

"No. Cold."

Berkeley smiled mournfully, and shook his head. "Ah, you're making a mistake, I fear," he sighed. "In our experience there seemed to be some — er — occult virtue in *hot* water. Once or twice, I remember, cold water was tried, but the maid's shrieks were terrible to hear. You *pour* it on? Yes. It is painful, isn't it? But I wonder that, with a sprain to be cherished, you should try to walk. If I were you I'd loaf in my friend Carter's room, and smoke and talk philosophy. 'Justify the ways of God to men,' you know, — and all that sort of thing."

"But here at the South End we find it easier to justify the ways of men to God," Jenks sug-

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gested affably. "That is the motive of your realistic novel, isn't it, Mr. Carter? Or does it deal with the ways of men to women?"

Though he had questioned Carter, his eyes were on Berkeley. It was such an absorbed and fascinated gaze as a naturalist turns upon an unfamiliar bug; and Berkeley was restive under it. He fidgeted in his chair for a moment; then he sprang up and stared, with an appearance of curiosity, at the litter of manuscript on the table.

"What about it, Carter?" he inquired. "And is this some of it — the Great American Novel?"

"No," said Carter, shortly.

"No," Jenks repeated. "The Great American Novel died with Brigham Young. What a masterpiece that blessed martyr might have written if he hadn't occupied himself in living one! Did you never think of it before, Mr. Berkeley? Take it home with you. It's a profitable theme for contemplation for a literary man, especially a single man. But our friend here," he smiled and nodded towards Carter, "will measure up to his opportunities and make us all proud of him, probably. I sometimes think it's a pity he isn't older, more settled in his habits; because, of course, there's always a danger that the South End may grow upon him,

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so to speak; his affections might become engaged, for instance, and then he would lose his keen appreciation of the difference between South Enders and civilized people, and his story would necessarily lack the charm of novelty it must otherwise have. You follow me, Mr. Berkeley? Yes, of course. How delightful it is to discuss these things with a sympathetic spirit!"

"But really" — Berkeley began; and then he stopped. A deeper red blazed into his florid cheeks and he looked shamefacedly from West to Carter. Carter had risen and gone over to the window, turning his back upon them all; but West grinned broadly as he encountered Berkeley's anguished eye.

"Give us a formula for novel-writing, Mr. Jenks," West said.

"I can tell you how to achieve a great novel — yes. Go through hell and back again, and write the story in your own heart's blood."

"Wouldn't it serve the same purpose if a man worked a year or two on a daily paper?"

Though Jenks had been very much in earnest he did not resent West's jocular paraphrase. He surveyed the young man in friendly fashion, and seemed half inclined to smile. But he made no answer in words, and Scanlon took advantage of

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the opening and started to tell a story. An imperative knock interrupted him in the middle of a sentence, and Mr. Miles entered with uncere-
monious haste, carefully closing the door behind him.

"Excuse me, Mr. Carter," Miles said in a low, mysterious voice. "I didn't know you had company. I was goin' to ask you — you too, Mr. Jenks and Frank — to let me know if you hear George go out. He's got a still on. Been nippin' all the week, and to-day he's hittin' her up pretty lively. He ain't disturbin' anybody, so I don't exactly feel like closin' him up, but I thought if he went out to dinner or supper or anything I'd just slide into his room and collar one of his bottles — sort of a gentle hint, see?"

"All right," Carter answered indifferently. "I suppose that accounts for my bottle of Three Star," he added, with a sour smile. "I left one in that closet when I went away, but it wasn't there when I came back."

"Like enough. George'll do anything for rum when he gets an edge on. Funny he can't take a drink like a gentleman, — same as us, — ain't it? All you c'n say is, he ain't built that way. But I'll see that he squares you for it, Mr. Carter, 'n' I'm glad you spoke of it. Good-day, all!"

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"How very interesting!" Berkeley murmured weakly, as Miles closed the door. It seemed that Jenks's gaze had compelled a comment. And Jenks went mercilessly on: "May I ask your views on the temperance question, especially as related to the woman question, Mr. Berkeley?"

"Oh, I really must beg to be excused," said Berkeley, with the accent of desperation. "I never think of 'questions' when I can avoid it. Indeed, I haven't time."

"You are a society reporter, Mr. Berkeley?"

"I write on social topics, yes."

"Ah, yes, yes, I understand." Jenks wagged his head and sighed; his air of gentle melancholy was intangibly yet effectively insulting. "I hope, Mr. West," he said, "that *you* don't fritter away your precious youth in dodging Living Issues through the gilded halls of wealth?"

West chuckled appreciatively. "Not on your tin-type!" he responded. "Democratic caucuses are my strong hold. The man who tries to dodge a Living Issue there gets it in the neck. Berkeley's graft is more high toned — and he works it to the queen's taste, eh, Carter? All the same, I think I have more fun."

"Perhaps your sense of humour is more highly developed. But I fancy even Mr. Berkeley would find amusing things in this brummagem

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Bohemia we call the South End. How would you like to live here, Mr. Berkeley, and be an example to us — like Mr. Carter? ”

“ Oh, it would be delightful, I’m sure,” Berkeley said nervously; he tried to smile, but he had seized his hat while Jenks was speaking and now he took a step towards the door. “ I’m afraid I must go, though,” he chattered in a panic-stricken way; “ you remember, Dicky, we have an engagement. We shall see you again, Carter, about the book. Charmed to have met you, gentlemen.”

Jenks balanced himself on his sound leg and impressively offered his hand. “ Thank you, Mr. Berkeley,” he replied. “ I have enjoyed the interview extremely. I hope we shall see you again, Mr. West,” he added in a different tone. “ We loaf and lie and smoke and swear at each other every Sunday, from 9 A.M. till midnight, — and you have the password.”

Once more he bowed to Berkeley; then he spat violently, resumed his pipe, and sat down again. To Carter and Scanlon, returning from the stairway, he showed the placid face of one who had never known emotion; yet he did not long keep silence. “ Now shall we come off the perch and talk United States? ” he asked.

“ Funny things we see when we don’t have

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our guns, eh?" Scanlon suggested. "Berkeley's a lulu, ain't he? West's all right, though."

"I suppose the baby elephant would be all right in his own menagerie," Jenks growled thoughtfully. "But when he gets loose and sets out to make a show of *me* and my surroundings I feel justified in putting him back in the cage at once. Isn't that fair, Mr. Carter?"

Carter delayed his answer. With strenuous motions that were like so many curses he pulled down the curtains and struck a match. Then he seemed to realise it was twilight still; the curtains flew up again, and he crushed the match between his fingers. He stared for a moment, frowningly, into the street, while he drummed on the window-pane. When at last he was ready to speak he did not turn towards Jenks.

"I don't care what you say or do to that — that epicene ass," he complained, "but I swear I don't know why you should want to make a fool of me! Why do you take it for granted that I'm a snob — and incapable — and then advertise it? How do you know I won't do the South End justice? — that is, if I write about the South End," he added hastily. "And for that matter, why shouldn't I write about it? You might go farther for a man to picture it, and fare a damned sight worse!"

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Jenks whistled softly to himself, and viewed his critic through half-shut eyes. There was no resentment, only solicitude, in the voice with which he answered. "I'm afraid you're too young to write a woman-story," he said musingly.

"But what" —

"Let that pass," Jenks interrupted; his manner now was brisk and challenging. "The vital question is, Why aren't you out shovelling snow?"

"What in" —

"No, in Massachusetts," Jenks put in suavely. "The fact is, I hate to see you wasted. You're physically sound; the size of those 'dumb-bells' proves it. Why don't you use your strength to replenish the earth and subdue it? Novel-writing is a reasonable diversion for women, and a fit employment, perhaps, for old men and cripples, but in a muscular young man it's as reprehensible as drunkenness. What do you propose, if you succeed — to win the privilege of living in your imagination and to extend the boon to your patrons — for all the world like a prosperous bar-tender who drinks his own liquor? Don't you see the analogy? Ah, but you would if you laid bricks for a living — made something useful, and at the same time sharpened your in-

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telle against practical things. And so — What is it, Frank? ”

Scanlon, standing near the door, had lifted his hand warningly. In the moment of strained silence that followed, they heard the rattle of a door-knob. “ ’S me ! ” called a maudlin voice, as though responding to inquiry. “ ’S me, G. F., you know. Le’ me in, darlin’ ! ”

“ Go away, instantly ! ” It was Miss Dow who spoke. Certain of that, Carter dashed across the room. The hall was almost dark, yet it was easy to recognise Fairbanks in the sprawling figure at the girl’s door. He was coatless and shoeless; his braces hung around his hips so that his trousers sagged loosely towards his feet. Begrimed, dishevelled, and steaming with foul odours, he clung to the door-knob with both hands, even while, muttering incoherently, he strove to turn it, — as though he needed the support that his hold afforded.

Carter went forward menacingly.

“ Well, what do you think you want ? ” he demanded.

“ None o’ your damn business, Mister Maurice Carter ! Carter — Carter — where’s your cart ? ” The fellow barely glanced at him, and at Jenks and Scanlon in the background; and his rambling words flowed on, low spoken, impersonal

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and uninflected, like a monologue uttered in a dream. "Come between me 'n' a lady — damn your cheek ! She's all right. I'm all right. She c'n borror money off o' me any time she wants to. 'N' I c'n borror drinks, f'r I always make good. Drinks f'm any damn sucker's bottle. Wake up, in there, 'n' le' me in !"

"Hello, Miles !" Jenks yelled down the stairway.

"Hello ! Comin' !" was the answer. And Miles and Mrs. Miles, Mrs. and Miss Palmer were added to the gathering, as Carter rapped at the girl's door.

"It's I, Mr. Carter," he called. "Don't be frightened." Then he turned to Fairbanks. "I don't like to touch a thing like you," he said ; "but if you don't start for your hole within ten seconds I'll throw you down two flights of stairs and kick you all the way to Station 5. Make a move, now !"

"Get away from that door, George !" Miles added sharply ; and Fairbanks released the knob and leaned limply against the wall, blinking stupidly around him. But the next moment he swayed and staggered forward, and Miles shouldered him into a corner and braced him with one arm. "Steady !" Miles commanded.

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"Oh, drop him over the balusters!" urged Miss Palmer from the stairway.

Miles glanced towards Carter and scratched his head deliberately. "Well, I d'know about that," he argued. "You c'n all see this mug don't know what he's a-doin'. If I put him out to-night, either he'll freeze on somebody's door-steps or he'll get pinched 'n' have to go to the Island. I *am* goin' to turn him out, for I don't want no such works as these in any place that I'm a-runnin'. But say I lock him in his room to-night 'n' let him straighten up a little, 'n' then dump him to-morrer? How's that, Miss Dow?" — for she had opened her door. "I'll do jest 's you say."

"Only keep him away from me!" the girl entreated breathlessly.

"You bet I will!" He twisted Fairbanks around and took a firm grip of his neckband. "Come now, George," he said, "brace up f'r a climb!" He pushed the fellow before him, down the narrow hall, towards the attic stairs. "Lift your feet, now. Oh, well, take it on y'r hands 'n' knees, if it comes easier. Yes, I'll give you a drink. I'll fix you up a sleepin'-powder, too, and when you wake up every bar in Boston'll be open. Stake you for a bracer? Sure I will, then. Got to have a sleep first, you

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know. Yes, that's right" — The door closed on them above, and cut off further words.

Carter had taken Miss Dow's hand, and he held it while the women gathered around her to soothe and sympathise. They did not seem to think it strange that he did so, or that she had spoken first to him. "I'm so thankful you were here!" she had said.

XIII

IT was a spontaneous utterance, and it seemed to betray affection. Therefore it pleased him — and would have continued so to do had he been able to forget its concomitants. Upon reflection, it occurred to him that by his method of identifying himself with Miss Dow he had imperilled his dignity. The hand-holding pose inevitably suggested a pair of country lovers ambling, open-mouthed, along a rural road. He ground his teeth when he thought of it; sometimes he cursed the impulse which had led him thus to make himself ridiculous. By way of averting gibes, or comments even, he wore a repellent front as he went to and fro; and since he knew that, against Jenks, this defense would not avail, he took care to come in at unusual hours, and to spend several evenings outside the house.

Concurrently with such manœuvres, however, he was planning to meet the girl in inconspicuous ways; and though sometimes his schemes failed, and at other times procured him nothing more than a nod and a smile, he noticed that she showed few signs of that embarrassment which she had foreboded. On the contrary, she seemed so willing to second his efforts towards comrade-

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ship that he might have believed he had won her — had not an occasional word or glance or gesture advised him that he was still on trial. The uncertainty riveted his interest and piqued his pride, and kept him moving in that endless circle within which the best of women delight to confine a follower. He felt that he must *know* — for the credit of his sex! There were moments, it is true, when he had horrific visions of a narrow flat, a bedraggled wife, and whooping, pawing children. But it was the present possibility of passionate, untrammelled youth, apt at devising delights, that chiefly held his mind. Almost he persuaded himself that to dwell upon the remoter future was needless and cowardly.

He might have succeeded in this had not the encounter with Berkeley introduced, or rather reminded him of, an element of perplexity. He held the *Ledger's* society editor in contempt, and yet he feared him. Berkeley would find it prodigiously amusing that a literary man, a college man at that, should marry a girl from Merchant's; and Carter foresaw that this lodging-house romance — that was what Berkeley would call it — would come on with the dessert at a dozen dinner-tables, and ultimately be "at home" with every idle woman who regularly exchanges tea for tattle. He could not hope to keep

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Berkeley in ignorance of the event. Still less could he hope that Berkeley would not talk of it, for the man's tongue wagged automatically, registering every sound that reached his ears. Yet it was possible to ensure that his merry gabble should not be spiced with malice, and Carter — who was capable of suffering acutely over imagined ridicule — had such a preventive purpose in mind when he set to and wrote the essay which he had conditionally promised. Quite aside from the motive, he thought he did good work. If nothing more than a masterpiece was needed to placate Berkeley the present effort should make the man his, Carter's, friend for life!

In the first flush of his enthusiasm, at six o'clock in the evening, he hurried the manuscript up to the *Ledger* office. Now, he believed, he would be *persona grata*, a man to be coddled; yet he did not yearn to meet Berkeley; and it heightened his satisfaction to find that the society editor was out. He left his packet, curiously conscious, as he put it down, of an enlarging sense of personal freedom. Then he crossed over to Merchant's, to wait for Miss Dow.

It was one of those treacherous, spring-like February nights when a Bostonian lays in his season's supply of influenza. Water had dripped

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all day from the roofs and steamed from the sidewalks, and there was still a deceptive softness in the air. Men with ulsters wore them apologetically and looked ashamed and unhappy. Carter hung his coat across his arm while he walked back and forth before the "Employés' Entrance;" but he was warm, and he felt lazy as well, and he distantly envied the young fellows, also waiting for girls, who, because they had no figure to sustain, could afford to sit down on doorsteps. Yet there was danger in the evening, and Miss Dow recognised it when Carter followed his first words of welcome with a spasmodic sneeze. "You're taking cold," she said, with a little laugh. "Put on your coat. You ought to get a hot drink."

"All right. Will you wait for me while I go in here after a rum punch?"

"Oh, you know I didn't mean that."

"Didn't you?" he quizzed. "Sure? Then I beg your pardon. Seriously, speaking of rum," he added as they fell into step, "I'm about ready to swear off. Not that I feel as though I need to do it—I don't care for liquor at all; but since I came to the South End it's been always before me, in one way or another, and I'm sick of the very name of it."

"That's good." He wondered at the keen

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delight that shone in her face; he hardly knew whether he should feel pleased or offended. He inclined towards the less agreeable emotion when she went on sorrowfully, "If you had needed a temperance lecture there was one in the life of that poor fellow who was turned out of Miles's."

"Surely you don't mean to compare me with Fairbanks?"

She shook her head. "Why, no, of course not. But I don't think you should boast that you're not in danger. You're an impressionable man, a successful writer has to be, and it would be easy for such a man to be influenced into a bad habit. That's why you ought to keep on the safe side. Don't you see?"

She met his eyes so frankly that Carter had to cover his vexation with a laugh and let the matter drop. It was hardly possible to pursue the recreation of character-analysis here, on a crowded street. Moreover, he suspected that he, as the subject, might find it even more exciting than enjoyable. "We won't argue," he said conclusively. "Suppose you come with me and get some supper."

"Not to-night, thank you. Nettie and I were going over to Charlestown, with one of the girls, but I begged off because I was so tired. I shall just drink some tea and go to bed."

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"I'd appreciate it if you'd let me have *my* way, once in a while."

"Would you? I think I'm very nice to you. Why, I've been planning all day to invite you to a party. Next Friday, you know, is the twenty-third anniversary of Mrs. Miles's wedding-day. I want you to tell the other gentlemen, and get some money, fifty cents or a dollar, from each one, so we can buy her something. Will you?"

Absorbed in the thought of it, she started mechanically towards an approaching car; but the young man restrained her and pointed down the street. Already the car was packed to the doors, and from every corner impetuous idiots hurled themselves at it and fought for a foothold on the steps; yet ten yards behind it crawled another car, bound for the same terminus, practically empty. The girl looked and laughed. "Thank you," she said as they boarded the second car. "But you didn't answer my question."

"I'll tell everybody and touch everybody — or see that it's done."

"Why do you put it that way?" Miss Dow demanded suspiciously. "You haven't been quarrelling with Mr. Holl or Mr. Jenks, have you?"

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"Not exactly. Mr. Holl manifested a little too much interest in my business, and I had to remind him that it *was* my business. That's all."

She glanced at him quickly, but a little timidly, as though she feared the dispute might have concerned herself. Apparently reassured on that point, she seemed the more perplexed. "That isn't like Mr. Holl," she commented. "Perhaps you misunderstood him. No, don't tell me how it happened." Nothing was farther from Carter's intention. "I wish you'd make up, anyhow," she went on. "Will you? To oblige me? I was pleased, the other day, — that Sunday night, — that you were so ready to take my part; I think a woman never forgets it when a man acts that way; but I'd be more pleased — honestly! — to know that all my friends were friends of each other. You'll be generous, won't you? Why, you can afford to be!" But with that she realised that she had said more than she meant to say, and, blushing rosy red, retreated into silence; while Carter, not quite unconscious of his fellow-travellers, but deeply resentful of their presence, swore to her in rapturous undertones that Holl should be his crony — that anything she desired should promptly come to pass.

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In spite of all this she sent him away when they had reached the "Home Dining-Room" that she chiefly patronised; and when he would have protested, and advanced a claim to tenderness, — "The month isn't up!" she said. That reminder did not lessen the uplifting confidence which he felt. Rapt out of himself into an atmosphere of bubbling satisfaction, he wanted to take others with him; he looked up hopefully at Scanlon's window. When it appeared that Scanlon was not at home, he started off down the street again. He treated himself to a drink. He wandered into a pool-room and watched a game, chuckling harmoniously with the victor. He spent a half-hour at a variety show, enjoying the antics of a thin-lipped, sharp-eyed soubrette who ogled a doting bald-head in a front seat. Then he strolled out Broadway to the bridge and leaned over the railing, staring at the water, smoking fiercely, and thinking in high colours, to quick music. A chill and dampening fog swept up the harbour as the night wore on, but though he retreated from it, after a while, he scarcely noticed he was wet. Only as he entered his room did a convincing sense of present realities come back to him. At once he remembered that he was expected to notify Holl of Mrs. Miles's anniversary — and perceived an adroit

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and agreeable way to do it: he wrote a letter, to be delivered when he was out of the house.

It was a sufficiently amicable message, if not a cordial one, and it enabled the young men to meet without awkwardness. They proved it on the following evening, when Holl stopped at Carter's door and smilingly handed him a dollar. Jenks and Scanlon and Nichols had already responded to personal appeals; and Carter exhibited the little purse and inquired whether they should buy government bonds or a house and lot. There was no allusion, as they joked about it, to any cause of controversy. Sustained by Miss Dow's inadvertent words, Carter was willing to be "generous" — and more: he was prepared to be patronising; and he had already decided that, since Holl could not be expected to attain to his own point of view, he would unselfishly yield to Holl's ignorant prejudice and make no literary use of the drunken Stackpole.

The longer he dwelt upon his own large-heartedness, the more friendly he felt towards the man who had unwittingly called it forth; and when he went down to the parlour, Friday evening, he made it a point to shake hands with Holl — while Miss Dow looked on. He did not quite like the smile that Jenks bestowed upon

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this ceremony; he hastened therefore to turn his back and go over to the girl. She was grateful and gracious, and though Miss Palmer displayed a prickly temper and Mrs. Palmer was glum, he contrived to keep the peace until the Mileses came in. Scanlon preceded them, and with a grand flourish waved them to seats. Carter saw, with surprise, that Miss Palmer sneered at the bit of by-play, and that Scanlon's assertive good-humour seemed to irritate her.

"You feelin' pretty well?" she asked acridly.

"Sure. If I felt any better I couldn't stand it."

"Thinkin' of the money you saved by not offerin' us rice wine, the other night?"

Scanlon put his hand to his ear. "Come again?" he said.

"Miss Casey told me to-day that when *she* went down to Chinatown her gentleman friend bought her some of the rice wine that the Chinamen drink. But of course it's expensive," Miss Palmer added, with a bitter laugh.

Scanlon looked grieved and indignant. "Did she say anything about takin' a ride after she drank it?" he asked in a tone of repression.

"Takin' a ride? Why? Where?"

"To Station 4, in the hurry-up wagon," Scanlon explained explosively. "That's where Chinese booze would land a girl like you. 'Twasn't

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the price of it, — you can play me for the limit, and you know it, — but I wouldn't sit up and make a monkey of you, not for all the Caseys that ever broke loose ! ”

The imputation of parsimony had touched him in a tender spot, and he retreated abruptly to the other side of the room and glowered at his sweetheart from that safe distance. Carter, too, was moved by the girl's unfairness. He eyed her disapprovingly a moment, and then glanced aside — at Mrs. Miles, who had put on a constrained, far-away smile, and who was doubtless thinking of the things she ought to do before bed-time ; and at her husband, ugly and uncomfortable in his best clothes, perspiring furiously, and wearing an apprehensive, hunted look. It was a painful sight ; it affected Miss Palmer, even. She laid her hand on Carter's knee and gripped it convulsively, as her mother suddenly rose and, rushing over to Mrs. Miles, dropped a parcel in the landlady's lap.

“ From all the lodgers,” mumbled Mrs. Palmer desperately. “ Hope you'll have many happy weddin's — I mean, anniversaries.” Then, the formality over, she straightened up and sighed, relieved ; and when the landlady had opened the package and brought to light a half-dozen teaspoons, Mrs. Palmer was able to

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she said, with manifest pride. "They're solid!"

"Well, I'm sure I'm ever so much obliged — to all of you," Mrs. Miles responded indistinctly. "See, Miles! Marked with 'M.' Ain't they pretty?"

"They're all right! And so are you folks! But say, Mollie," Miles added, "I got to peel off this cussèd coat. Bought it in a hurry, you know, — I was goin' to a funeral," he informed the company, — "and Moses McIsaacs soaked me. It hunches up, and binds me across the shoulders, every time I sit down."

"Take it off, Mr. Miles," said Mrs. Palmer, amiably. "We'll excuse you. Did you see these, Mr. Jenks? Did you, Mr. Carter?" Quite innocently and unconsciously the landlady was scrutinising the spoons and polishing bedimmed spots with her handkerchief; but Mrs. Palmer rescued two and held them out, just as Miles came back. He had taken off his waistcoat and collar, as well as his coat; his pipe was in his mouth; and he seemed once more at ease, prepared to enjoy the occasion. He nodded at his wife and winked to his friends and chuckled as he spoke.

"First time lodgers was ever known to give a lodgin'-house keeper anything — besides bricks,"

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he observed. "I knew, twenty-three years ago, I was gettin' a record-breaker. Yes, I'll take a cigar on it, Mr. Carter, — thank yeh." But he laid the cigar on the mantel. "I'll smoke it Sunday, if it's all the same to you. Fairbanks used to say a cigar goes with a shave 'n' a clean shirt, but the old pipe's always at home. Speak-in' about celebrations, though," he said between puffs, as he got the old pipe alight, "I wonder some o' you folks don't double up. Two rooms empty, you know, not countin' Fairbanks's attic; you could light-housekeep and live in swell style, right here. Mr. Nichols, why don't you or Mr. Jenks set these younger ones a good example?"

"Well," Nichols answered slowly, "I have thought some, in times past, of gettin' married again; but now Alfud and me are both growin' old, as you might say, I don't really need a woman."

Jenks laughed. Then he assumed that air of absolute frankness which Carter had learned to dread. "I'm past the marrying age," he said; "too stiff in the joints to undertake the preliminaries. I might be amusing as a love-maker, but I couldn't be impressive. I hope I'm not expected to make love in that realistic novel of yours, Mr. Carter?"

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"But he isn't writing any novel about *us*," Miss Dow interposed earnestly. "Are you, Mr. Carter?"

The young man shook his head; then, assuming indifference, he turned aside. He saw that Mrs. Palmer pursed her lips and cast up her eyes, half prepared to seem shocked at the girl's forwardness; but not even for the sake of punishing a censorious old woman would he consent to keep the subject alive. He walked to the other end of the room and busied himself with that last refuge of the distressed, the family photograph-album. When he went back Jenks was talking to Holl, and Miss Dow stood alone. The landlady was methodically wrapping the last of her spoons in the original tissue paper. As she laid them in a drawer and locked the drawer, she found her voice.

"Rooms reminds me," she said, to nobody in particular. "Did you notice I took the 'Furnished Rooms' card down from the doorway? I made up my mind, I'm so rheumatically this winter, I ain't goin' to fret myself any more about lettin' the empty ones. If the right ones comes, they can have 'em, and if they don't, why, they can lay, and there'll be so much less stair-climbin'. And as for transients, I never did encourage 'em — you may get a real nice

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man and you may let in a sneak-thief — and I just's soon that people goin' by wouldn't know this *is* a lodgin'-house. Miles 'n' I talked it all over when the landlord knocked off two dollars 'n' a half off the rent, last month, and we're goin' to try to take it easier."

"That's right," Holl commented; and Nichols nodded approval.

"I did think, one while, of fillin' up the house and sellin' out." The landlady made an effective pause and gestured warningly at Alfred, who, perched on the arm of a chair, was restlessly kicking the seat. "There's always jays that think there's money in a lodgin'-house," she went on, "and I could get six or eight hundred dollars for these furnishin's — if the rooms was all occupied; and then we'd go back to Searsport and buy a little place, and with Miles's jobbin' round and what we could raise, we'd save money. I know we'd be homesick, though; you like to be where there's somethin' goin' on, even if you ain't in it, — after you've got used to it. So we c'ncluded, till you young folks start marryin' 'n' settin' up for yourselves, we'll let things stay as they are."

It was impossible to evade the comprehensive glance which aligned him with those who might be expected to wed; but Carter did his best to

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appear calm and unconscious. He would not look at Miss Dow. He did not dare to think of Jenks. He smiled benevolently and stared into vacancy — until Mrs. Palmer spoke.

“For the land’s sake, Mis’ Miles, don’t talk so free about marryin’!” she protested. “If you had girls of your own, or if there was young men you wished well to,” — Carter was aware that her eye rested momentarily on himself, — “you’d be more likely to say somethin’ about marryin’ in haste ’n’ repentin’ at leisure!”

“Well — I d’know,” Mrs. Miles said slowly. The tone suggested helplessness. She wandered aimlessly up to the mantel and occupied herself, in bewildered fashion, in rearranging the ornaments — tacitly confessing that, like the others, she was at a loss. As for Carter, he felt that there was nothing he could say. In the first instant of rage and disgust he was moved to go over to Miss Dow and do something, anything, to emphasise his wish and his intention. But he saw no hint of welcome in her averted face; he feared to seem theatrical and absurd; and after all, — he remembered it with relief, almost, — she had not definitely given him a right to claim her. If only he had Jenks’s genius for envenomed utterance! he thought while he cudgelled his brain for safe, insulting words. If

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Jenks himself would only speak out ! When he perceived that the old man was merely entertained by Mrs. Palmer, not inspired, Carter stiffly and silently withdrew to the other end of the room, and sat down by the window.

He mentally cursed the woman, but, even as he did so, he deplored his own susceptibility to her offensiveness — since that offensiveness was quite in keeping with the whole disjointed scheme of things. He realised that most of life's miseries are brought about by people whom one would gladly avoid if one could ; that to be happy one should either be rhinoceros-hided, impervious, or as free to kill as a rat-catcher ; and he had a glowing vision of himself, triumphant, treading a long road that was carpeted with fools and brutes, and rejoicing to set his heel upon their faces. Then the vision faded. He saw the twinkling street, dotted with men and women, — these also the sport of Circumstance : not wholly blameworthy, even at their worst. A drunkard staggered out of a saloon ; a brazen little girl in a short dress hovered leeringly around the door of the Chinese laundry ; a gang of hoodlums skylarked in congenial shadow, just back from the corner ; students, labourers, serious housewives, shop-girls, servants, neglected children, men who measurably succeed, women

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who drift and sink, old and young, spruce or unkempt, purposeful or loitering, cramped with long hours of toil or restlessly on the alert for fearful gaiety, — pursuing, all, not the existence they would lead, but that which they could, the nightly pageant passed him by. In a lightning-flash of sympathy he saw the sad and terrible city street as God sees it; and his anger melted away, and he turned towards his kind again.

His spirit was high and his meaning was wise; yet, as though to prove that he was human, there followed straight upon his golden moment a second of sensual burlesque. He felt a twitching at his collar, as he took his eyes from the street and realized that Miss Palmer had stolen up behind him. "Wake up!" she said, bending over provocatively. "Floss has gone, but I'm here." She whisked between him and the window and pretended to look out, but she leaned back towards him and fidgeted against him. "You ain't leavin' me much room," she pouted, at the end of a suggestive sidelong glance. "Think you're strong enough to hold me up, if I trip over my own feet?"

Carter looked around. The place was deserted, now, save for themselves and Nichols. "Sit down on my knee and you *can't* fall off," he whispered intensely.

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But she winked, and laughed, and moved a little farther away. "I notice Frank got tired and went out when I poked my finger down your neck," she said — as it seemed to Carter — irrelevantly. "I'll make him sorry for talkin' back to me! Pretty sober evenin', wasn't it? If ma hadn't made her break, we'd all gone to sleep. I didn't think it of Mrs. Miles, though; did you notice she didn't even say peanuts? If anybody'd give me silver spoons I'd set 'em up, wouldn't you?"

"It's not too late to get some luncheon," Carter suggested. It did not occur to him that she might be using him to punish Scanlon; he assumed that she had been driven to himself by an overpowering impulse, and that he would have his reward if he met her half way. He tried to take her hand. "Come out with me," he urged. "I'll set 'em up."

"Too late," she answered briefly, with another laugh: and she slipped quite out of reach. "I wouldn't dare to, honest. We'd never hear the last of it, goin' out like that. I'll go to bed, though, and dream about you." She threw a kiss to him. Then, as he rose to argue or detain her, she fairly ran — trailing low laughter as she went.

Carter stared after her disappointedly, swear-

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ing under his breath. Presently, however, he chanced to look at his watch, and he admitted that the girl was right. It *was* late, and it was hardly worth while to seek amusement at the cost of scandal. There would be opportunities. He held his head erect as he went upstairs, exulting in this new, unexpected proof of his power to charm.

XIV

IF he had boasted himself without a cause — and there were low-spirited moments when he almost thought so — he was still spared the pangs of disenchantment. Mrs. Palmer paid seasonable tribute to the climate, with an attack of tonsillitis, and every evening her daughter, willingly or not, withdrew from the world with her. Carter and the girl scarcely saw each other for a week or more; he was left at liberty to believe anything he pleased about her feeling towards him; and though his mental attitude towards her was one of consent rather than eagerness, the fancy that she longed for him tended at least to enlarge his self-conceit. One result was that his manner to women roughened a little; another, that a touch of condescension crept into the tone he used with Miss Dow. It is possible that when this was most apparent she credited him with acting a part, trying to realise a character of projected fiction. She was gentle with him always; sometimes she even seemed amused by him. Probably she solaced her soul, at the worst, with the conviction that she could command him — as she did on the Sunday afternoon when she procured his attendance at a “patriotic meeting” in the South End Tab-

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ernacle. "I promised Mr. Nichols I'd go," she said plaintively. "He's asked me so many times I didn't like to keep saying 'No,' when I hadn't any real reason. But I — well, I promised because I thought you'd go too. I thought it would be an experience — that you'd see something to write about."

"Oh, I've been there," Carter answered heavily. He grimaced at the side of the building, which showed an eruption of violent placards, like a dime-museum. "It's an experience, sure enough. We never describe it, though, we fellows who write, because we don't want to give the town a bad name." Then he halted the girl for a moment and shook his finger in half-serious reproach. "And this is the way we go to walk, Florence Dow!" he complained. "You lure me clear up to the door, under the 'Seek Sweet Salvation, Sinners!' sign, and then you spring 'patriotic meeting' on me. If I go in there and let a narrow-headed crank tell me that Father Doherty and Frank Scanlon and a lot of my friends are destined to the other place, what do I get for it, hey?"

She gathered her skirt in her hand and, laughing a little nervously, prepared to mount the steps. "It'll do you good to go to church, Maurice," she whispered.

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It was the first time she had ever called his name, and the word sufficed. He hurried after her — rejoicing that at any rate the seats in the Tabernacle were close together; and when they had settled themselves he laid his arm along the back of her chair. "I've got to kiss you, sweetheart!" he said in her ear. "Can't wait, nohow! May I do it behind a hymn-book?"

"Behave!" She tried to speak severely. "You're in church!"

"I'm not. I'm in Paradise. If you try to snub me I'll fly up there and help the fat little bald-headed angel lead the singing. I'm going to sing, anyhow. Did you ever hear me sing? Just wait till he starts a hymn with lots of holler in it!"

She shook her head in disapproval. She was pleased that he was pleased, but his levity shocked her a little. He sighed and, folding his hands with an exaggeration of penitence, fell to studying the business-like chorus that rattled off, one after another, the happy-go-lucky hymns of Moody and Sankey; and the congregation, which, singularly unsuggestive of an urban environment, seemed to be restricted to two types, the lank and grizzled Yankee and the stocky, florid Provincialist. Awkward innocence and stolid selfishness, the selfishness that lacks sophistica-

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tion, were their most salient characteristics. In every row of seats, Carter decided, there was a man who would buy a gold brick — and another who would not hesitate to sell it to him.

He chuckled at the notion, and turned to impart it to Miss Dow; but she had taken up a hymnal, for defensive purposes perhaps, and she looked so demurely saint-like that he was ashamed to utter idle words. He only watched her — exulting presently to see how, as she grew conscious of his gaze, the colour crept up in her cheeks; how, finally, she had to lift her eyes to his and beg him, by a glance, not to put her to confusion. He gave her such a reassuring nod as conveys the sense of satisfied proprietorship. Then all the people began to clap their hands and stamp their feet, and the two strangers put aside their personal interests, and faced the pulpit.

“He can’t come on the platform without we applaud,” said a neighbour of theirs, with a wide and friendly grin.

“He” was the pastor, it appeared; a comfortable, waddling figure, topped with a face that expressed both pugnacity and good-nature, — the face of a reformed bar-tender. Two other men accompanied him: one aggressively Irish in features and manner; the second lean and

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dry and wrinkled, and timorously precise of movement, like a country schoolmaster caught in a crowd. The pastor — Dr. Doody, they called him — left them to find their own seats, while he charged up and down between the chorister and the organist, with the air of one disposing of great questions. Finally he waved the people up to sing “ America ; ” and when that was done he galloped through a dozen verses of the Bible, and commanded the country schoolmaster — “ our staunch friend Dr. Gullion, the king of anti-popery ” — to offer prayer.

The congregation applauded vigorously as Dr. Gullion sidled up to the desk. They did not applaud the prayer, though it was fervent, and manifestly inspiriting. With high-pitched nasal earnestness the minister besought God’s blessing on the courageous church that, every Sunday afternoon for ten years, had opened its doors to the faithful few who sought to stay the curse of Rome. He rejoiced that there were some indications that the curse was being lifted ; he itemized the indications — one of them was “ the coming out from that whited sepulchre of the brilliant young brother who will speak to us to-day.” He prayed that he, his colleagues and his hearers, might be endowed with wisdom to detect and courage to resist the encroachments

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of popery in city and State and nation. "We know," he said, "that up to the present time McKinley has done everything possible to placate Rome. God help us! God make it impossible to placate Rome in America!"

A solo by an ambitious little girl with a reluctant little voice succeeded the prayer. During the stir of relaxation that went on while the child was straining at the roof and falling hopelessly short of the chandelier, Carter once more surveyed the congregation. He thought that now he detected types other than the two he had originally classed. Besides the guileless fanatics, ready to believe anything they were told, and the determined fanatics, eager to fight for everything they imagined, he saw persons who had no vital interest in the propaganda: young fellows who desired to be amused, and who would nudge each other when the "ex priest" began to tell juicy stories of nunneries and the confessional; over-zealous sectaries who had not been encouraged in staid churches to yell "Amen!" and "Bless the Lord!" and who used this place as an exhaust-pipe; other sectaries, strangers to the city and the occasion, brightening from time to time as they recognised a shibboleth, but gasping in bewilderment when they caught a glimpse of the Orangeman's

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God; wise old saints who picked and chose a generous gospel and let the wild and foolish words go by; smug, dull-witted people who, having no special creed or inclination, came to church because it was a proper thing to do; idle or lonely or overburdened people, who came because they had nowhere else to go.

Yet somehow Nichols — Carter saw him while the contribution-boxes were going round — did not quite fit into either section of his category. There are men who, having been in some way defeated or distanced by an Irishman, contrive to identify his religion with their personal grievance, and cherish against it the ill-will which they durst not express towards the individual; and Carter idly wondered whether Nichols was one of these. He had not yet decided the question when another pressed for an answer: Why was Fairbanks here? For it was surely Fairbanks who rose — who sang, moreover — when the congregation rose to sing a hymn. He stood where a shaft of red light from a window played ludicrously across the yellow tangle of his beard, but that appearance could not obscure his evident devotion. To an imaginative eye it might have conveyed, at the second glance, a quaint suggestion of determined martyrdom.

It was more than doubtful, however, whether,

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Fairbanks being the man in the case, Miss Dow would perceive either the humour or the poetry of it; and Carter, turning towards her anxiously, was relieved to find that she seemed not to have seen. Until they sat down again he tried to hold her attention to himself. When her eyes threatened to wander he promptly directed them to the opposite side of the church. By such devices he engaged the girl until Fairbanks, safely seated, had become inconspicuous, and the "ex priest," Rev. Father Flaherty, had begun to talk about the downfall of popery.

There bade fair to be entertainment in this man, for he displayed that malignant zeal which seldom contents itself with commonplaces. He made a promising start by abusing, individually and collectively, the Boston clergymen who had failed to join the anti-Catholic crusade. Some of them, it appeared, were cowards, others were fools, and still others were "substantial infidels." Therefore he thanked God for Dr. Doody, "the bravest man in Boston, a mighty bulwark against the devastating flood of popery that has overwhelmed Italy and Spain."

The mighty bulwark looked down at his own broad chest and expansive abdomen and smiled appreciation of the metaphor. The ex priest licked his lips enjoyably, told a suggestive inci-

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dent, and proceeded to argue that Italy and Spain were decadent, dying, and that with the "down-fall" of these nations must come the downfall of popery. There may have been lapses in the reasoning, but there was no break in the chain of anecdotal invective; and so often as the orator rose a-tiptoe to emphasise a statement and settled back on his heels with a triumphant roar, his hearers waved handkerchiefs, clapped hands, stamped feet, and thumped canes in sympathetic satisfaction. Enthusiasm reached its climax when he described a visit to Cuba. "Talk about the morality of Catholic countries!" he cried. "Why, in Santiago, boys and girls, white and black, wear no clothing until they are nine years old!" Obviously such facts tended to prove that the Church of Rome meant to rule or ruin, to persecute, repress, outrage, and spoliage; and — though, to be sure, the Church was on its last legs — true religion decreed that Americans should vote for Protestants only and patronise Protestants in business.

As the last words sounded, half the audience — disdaining the benediction, it seemed — broke for the door; and in self-defence, to avoid a trampling, Carter drew the girl to join the stam-pede. Indeed, he felt that this was a righteous action. "I don't want to hear any man ask the

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blessing of God on *that!*" he muttered. Then, reaching the sidewalk, he pointed scornfully at the coloured canvases that stretched across the building. "'The Spirit and the Bride say Come to the South End Tabernacle!'" he read aloud. "'Living, Loving, Lustrous, Light-Bringing Discourses by Dr. Doody! Sweet Songs of Pearly Paradise by a Consummate Choir! The Holy Ghost will be with Us at 7.30 O'Clock. Come early and make Sure of your Seat! Don't forget the Heart-Lifting Prayer-Meeting at'" — Miss Dow laid her hand across his mouth.

He nodded understandingly. "Got enough?" he said. "Well, so have I. And I tell you, Florence Dow Carter, if you ever try to get me in there again, I'll apply for a divorce."

"I won't," she promised. "But you must tell me something pleasant to say to Mr. Nichols if he asks me how I liked it."

"Tell him it was lively and interesting. So it was. If that doesn't content him, tell him you're afraid you're not quite clever enough to assist the great reform; that you feel more at home with common folks — like me."

"But they took up a collection, didn't they? Then they're not reformers; they're philanthropists."

"How's that?"

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"Mr. Jenks says the difference between reformers and philanthropists is that reformers spend their own money."

Carter laughed delightedly. "Good old Jenks!" he cried. "How I'd like to hear him describe that—that" —

"Don't call names!" the girl interrupted. "You *know* good people go there; if they find happiness and comfort in what they hear, it can't be all wicked or silly. We're not all alike, you know," she added more shyly and slowly. "I think every church meets somebody's need."

"That one met mine, and I was an ass to overlook it," Carter answered. He dropped his hand caressingly over the hand that rested on his arm. "If the Pope's minions ever set fire to the Tabernacle I'll go down and put it out, just because you called me 'Maurice,' for the first time, on the steps! I take it that means that you're going to be generous and not make me wait a month — doesn't it, sweetheart?"

"Well," she conceded, looking away and reddening a little, "I like you better than I did."

"And how soon will you marry me?"

"Oh, my!" she said in a panic-stricken tone. "You mustn't think of that for a long time yet! I want to know you better, Maurice." The word and the glance that went with it made the saying

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seem far from unkind. "You've changed so since last November, I can't help wondering whether you're *yourself* yet. You *have!*" she affirmed — for he had laughed. "You were quiet and reserved and a little bashful, I thought, but now you're so much — so much livelier and " —

"Yes. You changed me."

"Did I?" she questioned doubtfully. "I thought it might have been the South End."

"Was I so very green when I came to Miles's?" Carter spoke good-humouredly. He was willing to admit that his present perfection had had its rise in incompleteness.

"N-no, it wasn't exactly that."

"Of course I've learned more or less in the last few months." He was serious now, of necessity. It was not altogether easy to explain himself, even in part, to a woman, and he had to think before he spoke. "A man is always learning, you know. I used to be indifferent to — some things, and I used to idealise — some things, because I kept to myself and didn't take pains to understand them. I think I see life, now, more nearly as it is. I've rubbed off some of my ignorance and I've tied a drag-rope to my imagination, and though I may stand less chance of going to heaven I'm more likely to have a good time while I'm on earth."

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She stared straight ahead and was silent. They walked thus for a moment, and Carter had almost ceased to expect a rejoinder, when she suddenly spoke. "Did you care for any girl before you met me?" she demanded.

"No, dear. Until I met you I didn't believe there was a woman in the world who could cause me ten seconds' uneasiness."

"How is it, then," she went on, with a puzzled frown, "that you act as though you respected all women less than you did a few months ago? Is that my fault?"

"No, dear," he answered, with an attempt at lightness, "it's my misfortune. Seriously, Florence," and now he tried to speak like one who is both grieved and annoyed, "I don't know how you get such notions! Just *what* have I done, please?"

"Oh, you haven't done anything!" she cried almost impatiently. "Don't you see, I'm trying to account for my impressions, not for any particular act of yours? You've no reason to complain, anyhow. Haven't I just told you I like you better than I did — in spite of it? But perhaps I'm afraid that, if you begin to think lightly of women, you'll end by thinking lightly of me." She looked at him and tried to smile, but she could not make her gaze other than interroga-

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tive, and Carter knew that his only resource was to bristle into an attitude of dumb, offended dignity. "How can we help misunderstanding each other?" the girl said sorrowfully, a moment later. "We never even have a chance to talk."

"You might invite me to spend an evening in your room," Carter suggested, unbending a little. "In a lodging-house, you know, no one thinks anything of it."

She shook her head. "No, I don't think it's nice. I wish I had a home."

"You can have one on twenty-four hours' notice. The Vitalline people are doing pretty generously by me. I'm not so poor as I look."

"I mean, I wish I had a father and mother."

"I'm glad you haven't. Since I've known Mrs. Palmer I've begun to suspect that mothers are a mistake. But why don't you and the daughter get together as you used to be? Then she could chaperon you and you could chaperon her, and Frank and I would find life worth living."

She shook her head again. "We'll have to wait awhile. Mrs. Palmer is getting their breakfasts and suppers at home, now, on an oil-stove. It saves some money, and she's so proud and happy to think she's useful that it would be cruel to interfere. She always goes back to Vermont, early in April, — she manages her own farm, you

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know, — and I told Nettie I thought we oughtn't to change rooms for the little time that her mother was here."

"You're a darling girl," Carter commented, "but I wish, for your own sake, there was a little more devil in you! You'd be justified in pitching that old woman right straight out. Yes, you would! Do you know, I never thought of it before, but all this talk of ways and means reminds me that even the South End Tabernacle has its place in the world: people who live in lodging-houses probably do most of their winter courting in church. Oh, you may laugh, but isn't it so? In the summer, they move to one of these side streets and acquire the doorstep habit. But in cold weather — Take your own case: you'll come down to the parlour to-night. That is, I hope you will. Pretty soon Alfred will break in and ride over us. Then Mrs. Miles will find there's something she forgot to do, wash the windows, perhaps, and while she's doing it she'll tell us how liver has gone up a cent a pound and the yellow-eyed beans you buy nowadays are full of gravel. Miles will be on hand, too, he and his long-distance pipe, and he'll ask us when we're going to get married. Nichols will be after you, to know how you enjoyed the Tabernacle and what you think *now* of the dad-binged

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Jesuits; and probably Holl will look in for long enough to drop a prophecy of the time when all the thrones will be in museums and kings and presidents will be set sweeping the streets. Of course Frank won't bother, because he knows how it is himself; and I suppose the Palmers are out of the game for the present; and Jenks wouldn't even open the door without a special invitation; but where do *we* come in, in spite of all that? Would you dare to call me 'Maurice' in front of any one of the crowd?"

She laughed as she answered, "No."

"So I'll have to look at you, and talk to the others, and suffer!"

The walk had led them out Columbus avenue and back through Warren avenue. Now Miss Dow signified that she wished to turn down Dartmouth towards Washington street, and Carter unwillingly assented. "I'm afraid I'm becoming conspicuous," she explained, with a helpless giggle. "It isn't kind to make me laugh so much when we're in the eyes of everybody — Sunday afternoon!"

"Why shouldn't we laugh, so long's we're happy?" Carter demanded; and then they turned the corner into Dartmouth street, and while the fond, self-satisfied smile still lighted up his face, came plump upon West and Berkeley.

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The young men dodged adroitly free of a collision, muttered an apology as they raised their hats, and passed on; but Carter knew that the swift and searching glances to which a reporter trains himself had taken in every detail of his companion's face and figure — that granting them artistic talent West and Berkeley would have been able to draw a picture of her; and he feared they had not seen her as he might have wished her to appear. He looked at her critically out of the corner of his eye; but he found no fault in her. Then he began to wonder how *he* must have looked, and to condemn the fatuous grin that he knew he wore. It was singularly unfortunate that Berkeley, of all men, should have caught him thus off-guard! He gloomed over that reflection until he chanced to remember that Miss Dow might notice and resent his lapse into speechlessness.

"Two *Ledger* men," he growled. "I don't like the red-headed one."

"But why should we let that bother *us*, Maurice?" the girl said softly.

XV

TO answer that question, to tell why a fat man's friendly smirk should have the curious effect of stiffening his smile and congealing his tongue, would have involved a ruthless analysis of his own nature — which Carter was not brave enough to undertake; or a linked and logical series of ornamental falsehoods — which he was not glib enough to carry through. He ignored it, therefore, and began to talk rapidly, somewhat at random, about various things: the newest "coon" songs, the prodigious prosperity of Vitalline, the schism in the Salvation Army, the fussy futility of the School Committee, the genius displayed by the window-dresser at Merchant's, and the trend of retail trade towards the South End. By filling his mouth and his mind with unrelated words he expected to content the girl and to regain his own balance; but the design was only half successful. So surely as he ceased to jabber of indifferent subjects and, looking at Miss Dow, felt an impulse of tenderness, the thought of Berkeley, commentator and critic, obtruded. About this time Berkeley would be wondering, for West's delectation, whether, in a lodging-house, love-making was a public function. Carter could imagine the whole

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nauseous monologue, from the first "Really" to the last "You know." And to think that Berkeley was even prevising the kiss he, Carter, had looked forward to, mentally diagramming the house in order to fix upon the secluded corner in which he might take it, — this, to Carter's ferocious sensitiveness, made the embrace itself seem almost like a tainted thing. He was relieved, though he would not have confessed it, when Miss Palmer met them at the door, and, with some whispered message of imperative, urgent need, dragged his companion away.

Now it was twilight, with dusk fast coming on, and the shadow-haunted street that he looked out upon seemed to harmonise with his own darkening fancies. He would not light the gas; and he sat for an hour, smoking sombrely, and thinking of all the humorous things that Berkeley might say at his expense. It had occurred to him, of course, that the fellows came to the South End for the purpose of talking about the essay he had written for their book. Because of that assumption, the first definite result of his tormenting self-communion was a determination to "have it out" at once. Since their call gave him a pretext, he would go and see *them*. He put up his dumb-bells, once or twice, and grinned savagely as he felt the muscles rise under his

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coat. God help Berkeley if he undertook to jeer while they were face to face!

He walked to Newspaper row. He could not have borne the confinement of a car — and besides, it relieved him somewhat to shoulder people off the sidewalk. His persistent imagination had translated Berkeley's possible slurs into actualities; in his blind rage of resentment he held the universe responsible for every insult; to administer a black look or a brutal "shove" indemnified him, in a measure, for the wrongs done him. He even snarled at the *Ledger's* office boy — though the boy chanced to be in a generous mood and would have met him as a friendly equal; and he presented his bitterest scowl as he came to the doorway of that corner cubbyhole in which Berkeley was at home. "Hello!" he said roughly.

Berkeley started, and dropped his eyeglasses. "Eh — er" — he began as he groped for them and stared at his visitor. "Oh, it's you, Carter," he said at length, with an accent of relief. "I thought it was that fellow Burgess back again. He killed a column of my stuff last night, — he was practising at the night-desk, — and he and I" —

"Were you two looking for me, this afternoon?" Carter interrupted.

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"Eh? Oh, yes! Have a chair." Carter was leaning against the end of the desk and frowning down, and Berkeley seemed not quite easy in his mind. "Just a moment, please," he murmured, nervously running over the papers in his pigeon-holes. "I'm so blind at night — you perceive I've had to take to eyeglasses — and even with their help — Ah, here it is!" He extracted a manuscript that Carter recognised. "We wanted to speak about the essay you wrote for us," he said. "I wish Dicky was here. I hardly know how to begin, really."

"If it doesn't suit you, suppose you begin by saying so," Carter suggested sourly.

"But that would be curt — and rude — and not quite true. The case is more complex than that. On the face of it, you see, this is admirable work; a stranger, or a Bostonian who didn't know his Boston, would delight in it, it's so explicit and humorous and polished; but the fact is, we — we think we stand for the intelligent native, don't you know? — we find our enthusiasm cooled by the fact that we don't understand your — er — your point of view. Sometimes, you see, your tone is sympathetic, and then again it's superior, and we've wondered whether that is quite — er — quite judicious? If you were consistently kind you'd please the South End, and

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if you were consistently patronising you might amuse the Back Bay, but — well, really, we're a little afraid you'll antagonise both."

"This is interesting," Carter acknowledged, with a shadowy smile. The interview had taken such a course that curiosity, rather than bitterness, was now his dominant emotion. He sat down, and looked soberly, but not unkindly, at Berkeley. "Go on," he said. "Tell it all."

"But that *is* all. If you cared to take back the manuscript and read it over, in the light of these suggestions — It's awfully nice in you, Carter! Dicky and I don't like to criticise, I assure you, but" — He waved his hands and shrugged his shoulders and smiled, to express that they did not deny the necessity but deplored it. "Do you know," he added, "I should have expected you to take the attitude of sympathy throughout."

"Why?" Carter demanded fiercely, prompt to suspect some hidden meaning.

"Why, because it has always seemed to me that you were sympathetic by nature," Berkeley innocently answered. "I can understand, though, that some details of your environment must be abhorrent to you — that dreadful old man Jenks, for instance, — so glad we didn't meet him this afternoon! and the landlord per-

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son who spoke, you remember, about 'gentlemen like us;' but we all have to concede a good deal to such people, my dear fellow, really we do; that is, unless we can afford to discountenance them altogether. We *must* do one thing or the other, indulge or snub, and do it regularly, as a matter of principle. I've learned that lesson so well!" He closed his eyes and threw up his hands, to signify sad and hopeless conviction. "And so your essay made me grieve, as well as wonder," he added in a tone of mournful sweetness. "It seemed to show, by those very inconsistencies I've spoken of, that your heart and your head must be in perpetual conflict; that you must be awfully uncomfortable, down there at the South End!"

"We'll leave my heart out of the question, if you please," growled Carter, suspiciously.

"Why!" Berkeley seemed surprised and hurt. "I used the word in its general sense. I'd be the last man to apply it to — to any matrimonial design, for instance. Surely you didn't suppose I meant *that*?" Carter only stared at him in silence. "Why, my dear fellow," Berkeley affirmed, "if that subject had even entered my mind, in connection with you, I should have dismissed it at once, feeling no apprehension, as I do in the case of some of my friends. I would

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have told myself, 'Carter is a man with a future; he knows it; his judgment won't permit him to imperil it; his marriage will be a reasoned affair.' But it's terrible — it's really immoral — the light way in which some of these fellows view the matter. Of course, you and I know, as well as they do, that women are a convenience, but the other fellows don't seem to realise, as we do, that it's equally true that no *one* woman is a necessity. It seems a very simple proposition: gratify a whim, and put your nose to the grindstone for the rest of your unlucky life; or exercise ordinary prudence, marry money, and secure everything that makes life worth living; but how many poor devils come to grief over that same proposition!"

"I wonder, Berkeley," Carter said slowly, — "I wonder whether you ever loved a woman?"

"My dear fellow, I love all women," Berkeley asserted fervently. "I could be happy with almost any; but I know I would be happiest with one who had a half a million or so. *Voilà!*" Then suddenly he lifted his hands to his head and twisted it back and forward until each individual red hair seemed to glisten in the light. "When did I ever talk so long, so seriously, before?" he cried. "Upon my word, I believe I've loosened it!"

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"Where's West to-night?" Carter asked abruptly.

"Doing a missionary meeting, poor boy! Aren't you thankful you're out of it all? You ought to be." He jumped up as Carter rose, and walked with him down the dim, long corridor. "Do the cages look familiar?" he chattered, waving his hand towards the open doors. "But where *is* everybody? Hark!" There was a sound of laughter somewhere in the distance. "Baker's room," Berkeley announced. "Baker always has a particularly dirty story for Sunday night, you know. I remember," he laid his arm affectionately across Carter's shoulder, "the boys used to call you 'Joseph' because you didn't care for that sort of thing. I honoured you for it, Carter, I did really."

Yet Carter drew away. He had no pleasure in this reminiscence of his salad days. "Good-night," he said, on an antagonistic impulse, "I'm going into Baker's." But then he bethought himself that Berkeley had used him well enough and that for various reasons it would be wise to part in peace. "I may conclude to wait for Dicky," he added in a friendlier tone. "If I do, I'll see you again. Anyhow, I'll have another whack at the essay. Yes, right off."

With that he turned across the hall, and

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entered a stuffy little room wherein were six young men. One of them was hammering a typewriter; another was studying a notebook; and four stood in the middle of the floor, loudly discussing local politics. Only the man with the notebook nodded at Carter, and only one of the four spoke to him, but he knew better than to suspect a slight. He went to the nearest open desk, filled a vagrant pipe from the bag of tobacco he found in the upper drawer, and explored the surface of the desk until he discovered a match. He joined the group for long enough to learn that there was nothing of interest to him in their discourse. Then he sat down on the corner of a table near Murray, the man at the typewriter. Murray was the only man in the party who was not smoking; he was chewing tobacco, and presently as he came to the end of a page he spat lustily, pushed his hat a little farther towards the back of his head, and sighed restfully. "Got a bottle of Vitalline concealed about your person?" he asked the visitor.

Carter shook his head.

"Vitalline's a damned good drink," Murray added as he slipped another sheet of paper into the machine. "Caught in a prohibition town, up in Vermont, week before last. Found some at the grocery, and it saved my life. Gee-whiskers,

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how it sells in such places! The Reubs fairly wallow in it. Bang-up advertising you're doing for the stuff, Carter, — that's right! Don't you be shy about making the firm give up, either. Tell 'em any old thing can hatch an editorial, but it takes brains to build an ad. That's right, too!"

Carter made no reply. Murray did not seem to care for one. He fell to at the typewriter again, and Carter knew himself to be practically forgotten. He smoked, swung his feet, looked indifferently around him, and was careless and content — almost. The fire-alarm tapper sounded in the hall and one of the group plunged downstairs. An Italian with a grievance came in, drew another into a corner, and told a long, loud story. But the others pursued their employments or employed their idleness in undistracted serenity — the serenity of men who have learned to control their nerves and mind their own business. There was something soothing in this philosophic indifference to ulterior things. Carter was loth to be roused from the contemplation of it, as he was when Harris, glancing at his watch, closed an argument by calling Baker a political prostitute, and went away. Baker looked over at the visitor, and laughed.

"Ah, there, old man!" he said. "How do

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you feel towards City Hall? Knife up your sleeve, or both eyes on the pie-counter?"

"It doesn't worry me," Carter answered.

"Too busy getting rich, eh? Wish I could strike a patent-medicine snap! Berkeley says you show all the signs of prosperity: your paunch is enlarging, your tongue shortening, and your head swelling. How's that?"

It was merely the rough-and-tumble kind of comment that flourishes in newspaper offices, and Carter could easily smile at it. "I suppose that represents a day's work for Tad's alleged intellect," he said.

"Don't you slur Tad's intellect, my son! It's in his own head, even if the New York heiresses *do* call him 'the Football.' After all their kicking him back and forth, he's landed, we hear. Her pa's a brewer, and she's the only child. If you think you can afford to criticise the lad," Baker added, half in earnest, "it's up to you to beat that."

"Oh, that be damned!" In Carter's tone there was that contemptuous violence which always ends debate, when it does not provoke a riot. Baker's words and manner told him, as he read them, that the boys had heard he had a sweetheart; and with that consciousness there had returned upon him the feeling of angry uneasi-

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ness which he had been trying to supplant or stifle. The conversation awkwardly took another turn; then it languished. After a little while, Carter nodded a gloomy good-night, and stumbled down the back stairs. He did not care to put himself in the way of meeting any more old chums. This hour or two had yielded him no satisfactory opening either to fight or to argue. Instead of gaining relief by one of these means he had been overborne, bamboozled, he felt. Moreover, he had found additional matter for disquieting reflection in Berkeley's discourse on judicious matrimony. He wondered, How much of that was true?

With an effort he shook himself free from all this, and opened his mind to the influences of the starlight evening and the cheerful street. He strove to enter into the joy that other young people seemed to find in walking back and forth and staring at each other. He idled in front of curtainless shop-windows and, small-boy fashion, picked out the things he would like to have. Salvationists were holding a meeting in an alley just above Boylston street, and he lingered a moment on the edge of the group and heard them expound their iron-backed, leather-lunged gospel. It bore no message to him; but the sight of the people themselves reminded him of

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his novel. That must be completed, he decided as he turned away; and doubtless through continuous and persistent labour he would find the issue out of all his perplexities.

He felt better for having reached this definite conclusion; yet, somehow, it made it no easier to go into the house and meet the girl who was probably awaiting him. He loitered up and down the opposite side of the street, thinking of the novel, steadfastly ignoring romantic possibilities in the present; until by and by it came to his notice that some one was standing on Miles's steps, and that his own aimless wanderings would hardly be overlooked. Some one else, in Miss Palmer's room, lifted a curtain, and he felt a swift suspicion that he was spied upon — though instantly he saw the absurdity of the notion and reproved himself for conceiving it. Manifestly, however, he must go in, now; he could give no excuse for not going in — if *she* chanced to see him. With unlover-like slowness he made his way across the street, and greeted Jenks, the man on the steps. "Fine night," he said.

"All nights are fine in Boston," Jenks responded calmly. "How goes the novel?" he demanded all at once, as Carter stepped up beside him.

It was an irrational impulse, Carter assumed,

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that prompted him to confide in the old man, yet he desperately yielded to it. He put his latch-key back in his pocket and lighted another cigar. "I'm stuck," he said.

"Did the hero find the heroine in a 'Turkish Smoking Parlour' and refuse to believe that she went there to distribute tracts? Or did the heroine send away the hero because he wouldn't lend her his football suit to wear to a bargain sale?"

"No," Carter absently answered. "I'm wondering whether it's advisable to tell the truth about women."

"Do you think you know it?"

"I know some of it."

"Well," said Jenks, after a long silence, "that's as much as Solomon knew. Taking your word for it, I don't see but you're pretty well equipped." Carter would not permit himself to get angry; he waited. "If I were in your place," Jenks added at length, "I'd tell as much of the truth as seemed true to the young lady upstairs — and stop at that."

"Conform to the old conventional standards, eh?" Carter sneered.

Jenks nodded. "Precisely. If a writer could choose his audience it wouldn't be necessary to give such advice; but he can't. Suppose you

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made a comprehensive catalogue of woman's weaknesses: fair-minded readers might offset every fault with a virtue, and be all the better for the intellectual exertion; but the Willie-boys and the Yahoos would take the thing just as it stood, use it as a text-book, and conclude that they have a right to be — the things they are. Do you see any glory in that?"

"It isn't a question of 'glory.' It's a question of conscience against expediency."

"Nothing of the sort. If you could sound the depths of any human soul you might have a right to exhibit the queer things your drag-net brought up. But you can't. Nobody can. For instance: Mrs. Palmer is as fanatical an anti-Romanist as Nichols is, but though she has used every other argument to induce her daughter to turn Scanlon off, she has never even hinted that his Catholicism weighed against him. Why? Is it deep diplomacy on her part — or is it an outbreak of that natural common sense which forbids one to identify a tolerant, truthful, clear-headed, warm-hearted man with the racks and thumb-screws of the Inquisition? If you depicted that situation it's ten to one you'd answer the question wrongly — and I doubt whether the woman herself could explain herself. You *can't* be exact and exhaustive, you see; you've got

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to guess at a good deal, and take a good deal on hearsay; and if your conscience is really in good working order, if conceit of intellect hasn't clogged it, you'll be very shy of manufacturing sins and imputing faults."

"You don't seem to be very shy of bringing accusations against me," Carter complained.

"I admonish you for your soul's good, my son, — just as I frequently reprove Nathan here." Holl had come up to them as he spoke. "Pleasant evening, Nathan," Jenks added cheerily. "Just come from church?"

"Yes."

"Eh? What?" Jenks demanded incredulously.

"I met Fairbanks, and I went with him — to please him — to early prayer-meetin' at the Tabernacle. He's goin' to join. He says he loves Jesus." Holl rubbed his chin in an embarrassed way, and spoke slowly, as though he did not like to utter the words, but felt it his duty to make a faithful report. "He says he's got a new heart."

"I thought it was a new brain he needed," Carter suggested.

"No, I don't think George is stupid, when he's himself," Holl answered mildly. "He voted the Socialist ticket last fall." Jenks chuckled, but

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did not speak. "I d'know about these things," Holl went on in a tone of bewilderment and doubt, "but sometimes I think — I d'know but religion does some people good. I can't swallow it myself, you know, but maybe — Anyhow, it ain't any use to argue. If a man says he's 'saved,' how you goin' to prove that he ain't?"

"We don't," said Jenks. "We go off one side, and give *him* a chance to prove it."

"Well, I sha'n't say anything to discourage Fairbanks," Holl announced conclusively. "I got to dodge him, Sunday nights, though," he added, with a serious head-shake, as he turned to unlock the door. "He might want me to go to the Tabernacle again. Honest, I couldn't stand it."

The men on the steps laughed sympathetically, but, content with the discreet companionship of his tobacco, neither made any remark. When various questions and comments occurred to Carter, he suppressed them, one by one, — warily conscious that silence was safer than speech. But Jenks did not wait for an invitation, when at length his time came to deliver himself. "If Fairbanks gets converted," he said, soberly but suddenly, "he'll make a pretty good husband. Matrimony will complete the cure. He'll have to marry Miss Dow."

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"Not much he won't! I'm going to marry her myself! "

The young man spoke in haste and anger, all his combativeness roused by the monstrous assumption. Then as Jenks smiled at him benevolently he took the second thought. He realised that the other had simply angled for information — and obtained it. To think that he had proved so pliable a subject made him more angry still. And yet there was nothing to be said or done. He could only cut short Jenks's artistic felicitations, and tramp upstairs to seek safety behind the closed door of his own room.

XVI

LATER, in one of those quiet hours when a man's conscience sits in the opposite chair and mows and gibbers, Carter admitted to himself that he was too easily influenced; and since his self-conceit was rather a prejudice than a passion, not potent enough to sustain him always at the critical moment, he decided that the surest way to achieve independence would be to succeed, to win an overpowering reputation, preferably in literature. He believed he could do this — in spite of Berkeley, the devil, and all their works. Once more he set to at the essay, in a mood strangely compounded of pride, abasement, self-distrust, and bitter determination. Neither to patronise nor to "slobber" was now the ideal he strove to pursue, and he revised his manuscript in the unyielding spirit of that sage who first constructed the multiplication table. Then he shipped it back to Berkeley — by mail — and took up his novel.

He had to face the fact that half of his day, sometimes more, was necessarily given to the service of Vitalline, by which he lived. It was obvious that if he permitted Miss Dow to monopolise two or three hours of the other

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half the novel would grow slowly. He laboured long with harassing meditations upon the attentions she would expect and the time he could afford to spare — until the helpful thought occurred to him that, really, the work was all for her, and that a fair contribution to it, on her part, would be his freedom. That was a luminous inspiration. It enabled him to pride himself upon the devotion that could sacrifice pleasure to follow the path of duty; and at the same time, though he did not consciously dwell upon this phase, it lightened his sense of responsibility, inasmuch as it postponed unalterable acts to the decision of — the future. Doubtless he would have denied, in all sincerity, that this latter idea was in his mind. Indeed, he felt that he had never loved the girl so fondly as he did when he sought her out for the purpose of imparting his plan. It was in the parlour. They were alone. He kissed her, and lifted her hands to his shoulders. He knew there were tears in his eyes. He was proud of the tears.

“I’m going to neglect you, Florence, for a whole month,” he began. “Do you think you can be patient if I tell you I’m doing it for both our sakes?”

“I’ve been alone most of my life,” she said

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slowly. She withdrew her hands; then, as though she regretted a distrustful impulse, she put them back. "But what do you mean?" she asked.

"I've *got* to finish that novel." It was not so easy to argue in behalf of a distant uncertainty, when this girl was in his arms; but Carter forced himself to be rapid and emphatic. "I can't bear the notion of being nothing but one of the crowd, somebody's hired man, plodding along to earn a bare living, and forgotten by everybody but my wife, the day after my death. I think I can write a story that'll put me in the way of winning reputation and money, and set me out of the reach of the whelps that find it easy to worry a poor devil of an ad.-writer. But while I'm doing that, you see, I've got to keep up my work for Vitalline, so that if I fail there'll still be something to fall back upon. And I can't carry on this outside scheme if I spend every other evening with you, as I'd like to, as I ought to. Now, I'll leave it all to you, sweetheart. Shall I give up my ambition — very likely I'd prove to be only a duffer, anyhow — or shall we be strangers for a few weeks, while I try to find out what there is in me?"

She looked away from him. A smile that he did not quite understand hovered an instant

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about her lips. "I'll promise not to bother you, Maurice," she answered, "on one condition."

"What's that?"

"That when you get tired of me, and want to drop me altogether, you'll come and tell me so."

He was dangerously near to making a petulant retort. He suppressed it in favour of words that would intimate dignified reproach. But before he uttered these, even, he had accounted for her words by the presumption most flattering to himself—that she merely took a roundabout way to elicit an assurance of fondness. He only laughed. "I will," he said. "Honest Injun! Cross my heart!"

"Now tell me about the novel." With decisive gentleness she put his arms away, and went over to one of the stiffest, most unapproachable of Mrs. Miles's chairs. It was upon his conscience to respect her wishes, since she had been kind; and he stood before her, much in the manner of a painstaking schoolboy, and revealed as much of his scheme as it was safe to let her know. The Salvation Army figured largely in his design, he told her. His heroine was one of its captains. As for his hero, he, Carter, had already shown his superiority to all other novelists, since instead of one hero he had manufactured two. But here she interrupted:

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"I thought you'd be the hero of it," she said, between jest and earnest. "If a man can't be the hero of his own novel, what advantage has he?"

"No, dear," he replied uneasily, "I'm not heroic." And he hastened to rhapsodise on the serene, incommunicable height to which success elevated an author, and on the quantity of money that such an one made. He had a fancy that Miss Dow was not greatly impressed by this. She seemed to seize the opportunity to escape, when Mrs. Miles came in and began to "dust." "I wish you luck!" she said as she slipped by him; but when he made for the hall, with the intention of a good-night kiss, she was half-way up to the next floor; and she would not wait or turn back.

But this was a detail. The essential fact was, that she had excused him from all those obligations which, adequately to fulfil, would wear a conscientious wooer to the very bone. He might hibernate in his room and work from three o'clock till twelve: no one else had the right to make a demand upon him. To a man who yearned for "independence" this seemed a fair beginning. And after he had met West, as he did on the very next day, Carter joyously concluded that fortune favoured in every direction; for though, in reply to a question about the amended essay,

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West only answered vaguely, "Oh, that's all right! Hot stuff!" Carter assumed that he would have said still less had Berkeley been dissatisfied. Sustained by that heartening belief, he dropped the matter out of his mind, and placed an embargo on all thoughts of Berkeley, save such as were contemptuous. And in this assured and hopeful temper he began.

He had believed that he saw clearly and could report accurately the conditions of life with which he meant to deal. That conviction did not weaken as he reviewed the pages he had written weeks before. Yet, technical faults aside,—he recognised many,—he had numerous corrections to make, corrections imposed on him by his growth in knowledge. The tone of the work was so generous that it verged on the sentimental; he decided that this showed weakness; he strengthened it rigorously; and when the situation seemed to demand that a sweet, sympathetic saying be retained, he offset it with an epigram. For the passages of description and philosophy, readers might hold him accountable, and such passages should consist of facts and truisms, innocent in themselves as a baby's kiss; but by the mouths of his characters it would be safe, he thought, to express his frankest, most heterodox judgments. Working along

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these lines, he could deliver himself fully, to the joy of the discerning and the helpless perplexity of the — women. Perhaps he would make one derisive concession to the feminine reader: after he had stripped her sex and scourged it through three hundred pages, under such circumstances that she would be able to make no articulate protest, he might at the very last defer to her dearest prejudice by making the novel “end happily” — like a comic opera.

All these high designs represented, of course, the first masterful moods of a writer who has not lost the delusions that he can “see the end from the beginning” and that he can do what he will with men and women of his own creation. After a while he perceived that, for instance, a certain climax which he had looked forward to with pride would be, as it were, an offence to the landscape; he realised that his characters were rather obstructive than resilient, if he put them into places which *they* did not wish to occupy; and he found that there were times when no provocation would lead them on to say brilliant things. It would have been comparatively easy to let his people work out their own salvation; but in that event Carter knew that his own acute reflections and immortal witticisms would be wasted. Thus there com-

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menced the deadly struggle in which every novelist has taken part, between the Possible and the Imperative. Sometimes Carter triumphed. Sometimes he tore up a few pages, and that meant that the People had won.

More difficult, even, than the guidance of his characters was to regain, each afternoon, the frame of mind in which on the preceding night he had left off. In the cold white light of day the rounded sentences appeared to shrink and shrivel, and though he might rewrite them he could not always seem to bridge the "break" between the instalments. In desperate moods, when he dealt most largely in conjunctions, he fancied that in spite of interlinked sentences there was an empty space at the end of every paragraph. To change from one scene to another, to bring on a character, above all to ensure one a graceful exit—these were minor problems, comparatively, yet these also puzzled and delayed him.

Naturally he soon experienced a temptation which besets all writers of fiction, to pillory real persons whom he disliked. It was not conscience that restrained him,—he found much pleasure in distorting the features of Jenks, to whom he bore no urgent ill will,—but the awakening consciousness that, before he squan-

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dered any time on aliens, he must get better acquainted with the men and women who were really essential to his scheme. When he came to sum it up he was amazed and depressed to find how little he knew about Socialists and Salvationists, and how much there was to learn. He spent an evening with Holl, and led him to talk about the theory of surplus value, the "new" trades-unionism, and the rigid discipline of the Socialist Labor Party. He hunted out the odd little groups of Socialists that seem instinctively to gather by nationalities: the Germans of Roxbury and South Boston, the Russian Jews of the North End, the Scandinavians of East Boston and Charlestown, and the Americans of Dorchester and the City proper. After Alfred traded a jack-knife for a harmonica there were evenings when the boy put all his soul — and lungs — into that melancholy instrument; and then Carter plodded down to the Army Barracks and for an hour or two looked, listened, reflected, and kindly but firmly repelled the earnest young officers who hugged him and demanded to know if he were saved. Generally before starting on such an expedition he took the trouble to hunt up Miss Dow and assure her that, though he seemed to be leaving his work, he was *not* on pleasure bent. It

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made him feel virtuous to do this considerable deed and to demonstrate anew that he was the slave of Duty.

It is to be noted at this point that though their personal relations were harmonious enough, Miss Dow represented another of his perplexities. During these hurried interviews — he would not trust himself to take part in longer ones — he studied her with despairing intensity. She was the prototype of his heroine, the Salvation Captain; he believed he had already made the portrait recognisable; therefore the need was upon him to enter into the mind of a good woman and at every moment answer the question, What, in this situation, would *she* do and say? He was willing to be flattering; he was necessitated to be truthful; but since he looked slightly upon women in general it was most difficult for him to conceive and depict the exceptional nature. When his heroine was not stiffly unreal she seemed flabbily so. He had glimmerings of a girl who, though she might practise the small evasions and dainty sophistries in which the experience of ages has confirmed her sex, was still strong, wise, self-reliant, tender, pure in an evil world, and pitiful in a pitiless civilization. But when he strove to actualise the vision it faded, and he groped in dust again.

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Nor did it need a failure in this direction to teach him the immensity of his task. Viewed in its physical aspect merely, it sometimes appalled him, for his best plans for large accomplishment were always liable to be nullified by the forces within and without that no man can understand. On his brightest, happiest days he might prove to be quite helpless! True, there were compensations. When he had gone to his work with distaste and laboured heavily through sentences that were only words, he might find himself, of a sudden, staring at a phrase, perhaps a whole paragraph, which seemed a perfect thing, and which he could not attribute to any conscious process of his own thought. Such experiences were still more common later on, when his nerves were a-jangle, — as though the good God were quietly reminding him that “inspiration” is only a diseased condition, which sane, well-balanced men do not have to share.

A writer’s judgment of things real and near at hand is likely to be warped at such times; and as February wore on into March, and spring began to riot in his blood, Carter fell into the habit of vain imaginings. The normal noises of the lodging-house suggested so many conspiracies against him and his work. The brisk good-fellowship that prevailed in the “labora-

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tory " at Exmouth seemed to imply a dark design to put him on a social level with the errand-boy and the scrub-woman. Raising his window at midnight, after one wearing day, he thought he heard the policeman at the corner say to his partner— they both laughed —“ The damn fool's tryin' to write a book.” He fancied esoteric insults in the lazy gestures of corner loafers — unaccountably losing sight of the fact that, on principle, these vermin attack women only. He suspected unflattering comments on his appearance, when girls, giggling, passed him in the street. Now, indeed, some of his former shyness seemed to return upon him; he had a curious notion that certain erect, alert, level-eyed women read in his countenance an intention to depreciate their sex, and looked him down resentfully.

With such as these he could not take the brutal, overbearing tone which would have been his weapon against a light woman; he could take no tone at all; and his only defence, against the contempt he imagined, was to drop his eyes or to look away. He could, and he did, glare fiercely at the girls and the hoodlums who seemed to notice him. Easily, too, he could discourage levity on the part of his associates — by becoming stiff, severe, and uncompanionable. He

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ceased the expression of that facile kindness which, though it means so little, goes so far to answer the ends of civilization. As much as circumstances would permit, he withdrew from civilization.

Occasionally, though, there came an evening when he caught himself grotesquely misspelling simple words, writing one word when he wished to write another, or trying to guard against sudden nervous finger-twitchings that filled the page with scrawls. He dreaded to go to bed — to toss feverishly from side to side, to brace his feet, yet quiver under the tension of strained and snapping nerves, to feel that his brain was now a blank and now a ball of fire, to know that opiates would procure him only the dreamless horror of unnatural sleep. Then to invite that deepest physical fatigue which is almost devoid of sensation, he would plunge out of the house and make the circuit of the South End — from Kneeland street to Roxbury, from the South Bay to the Providence tracks. Incidentally he would drink more than was good for him; and sometimes he yielded in a dully ferocious way to sensual provocation. Not that there was any urgency of personal temptation; he might have accounted for his doings by saying truthfully that any change seemed restful.

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Following one of these nights his morning dumb-bells did not allure him. He preferred to take a drink of whiskey, go back to bed, smoke luxuriously, and foggily meditate many things — until it became time to dress and make ready for Exmouth. He was childishly proud of the fact that no matter what like the night had been he had always kept office-hours and done his fullest duty by Murdoch & Gibbs. Vitalline had not suffered because of the novel. He was sure of that; indeed, he inclined to think that he had wronged the novel, consequently himself, by contributing much unappreciated and some unpaid-for labour to the advancement of Vitalline. He voiced this impression very forcibly one day, when Gibbs had mildly criticised his phrasing of an important letter. Warming with his subject, though Gibbs gave no real provocation, he finally commanded the partners to go to — another place and find a more pliant tool. Then he put on his coat, furiously glad of the explosion that had relieved his nerves, caring little whether he were right or wrong, and giving no thought to the future. But the unexpected happened. Gibbs protested, almost with tears, that no offensive intention was in his mind; they could not get along without him; he must stay; they would pay him more money — aye, they

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would give him an interest in the firm. And Carter was persuaded.

He was not wholly taken by surprise, and he was not particularly grateful, — after all, he reflected, he was getting no more than he deserved, — but the sudden improvement in his prospects naturally pleased him; and either the pleasure, or that recondite stimulus which anger sometimes imparts to the whole system, seemed to work a renewal of his inspiration. After two or three productive nights, came the long, unbroken stretch of Saturday and Sunday; and then, almost oblivious to the outside world, he turned off page after page of manuscript that seemed to cost him neither deliberation nor effort. He knew, now, how his characters would act, what they would say. They lived their lives before him. All that he had to do was to report the facts; he was not even under any perplexity concerning the words he should use. He gathered up the book, in the small hours of Monday morning, and when he had read it through he resolved that it should stand. He did not believe that he could better it; and he did not quite dare to tamper with it, because of a superstitious respect for the impulse that had carried it to completion. Later in the day, he handed the manuscript to a publisher he person-

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ally knew, asking a prompt decision. Then he flung a few indispensables into a bag, and took the Eastern train.

Indifferently he dropped off at Old Orchard. He was two months ahead of the season, and, unpolluted by the summer boarder, there was health and comfort in the place. He wrestled with the winds along the beach and creaked through the snow that packed the hollows of the woods, and felt that some of the vigour of the sea and the pines passed into his blood. He was determined not to think — only to exercise, eat, and sleep and get in tune with the universe. He conceived he had accomplished his purpose, after ten days or so, and he soberly and thankfully boarded the Boston train — and went to see the publisher.

The publisher had read his novel; liked it; would gladly undertake it. The manuscript should go to the printer at once.

XVII

THE April day was full of the potency of early spring. The sunlight seemed to animate as well as warm, imparting a confident and joyous vigour. And after Carter had made a flying visit to Exmouth, and from the heartiness of his welcome inferred the immensity of his usefulness, he began to be very well satisfied with himself and the world. Vitalline was already a "money-maker," and his one-seventh of the profits would likely amount, the first year, to a thousand dollars or more. Henceforward, in any event, he was to draw a salary of thirty dollars a week; that was stipulated in the new agreement. The figures summed up wealth to a youth who knew how to live on four hundred dollars a year and who had never earned more than a thousand. And when he reflected that his novel would probably yield another fortune, not to speak of fame, he could easily foresee the time when he would either have to enlarge his wants or be overwhelmed by his possessions.

Now whimsically, now seriously, he contemplated these alternatives, whilst he walked from the station to Miles's. He almost wished that he had used himself to a lavish manner of life, even though it had been pursued, as it must have

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been, at the cost of creditors; and he vaguely regretted his lodging-house associations, which he felt were not the most ornamental antecedents for a prominent citizen. To be sure, he was able to perceive their bearing upon a literary career; he could understand that an artist should welcome every experience, and deplore no action which tends to widen his knowledge of humanity. But the truth was, though he did not clearly recognise it, that he was now thinking of literature rather as a means than as an end, fixing his attention upon the rewards of art, while tacitly resolving not to pursue art at the sacrifice of ease.

Sane or unsound, however, all such dreams of the future had to be suspended when he met Mrs. Miles. She was wholly of the practical present: he owed her four days' room rent. He paid for the week. Then he would have gone on upstairs, but she began to speak in the passionless monotone that was her habit; and he, standing in the kitchen door, watching her while she kneaded bread, was well enough content to listen.

"This fortnight's made changes," she said. "You see I'm cookin'. Katie struck f'r four dollars, 'n' bein' 's I'd just lost another lodger — Mis' Palmer's gone back to Vermont — I didn't feel to give it to her. So I'm doin' my own work 'n' lettin' a good deal of it go with a lick and a

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promise, till I c'n find a three-dollar girl, or three 'n' a-half. Miss Dow 'n' Miss Palmer's roomin' together again, so there's one less room to take care of, but I know the house looks like a hoo-rah's nest, 'n' if you'll shut your eyes to the thickest of the dirt I'll be thankful."

Carter laughed. "I can stand it if Mr. Miles can," he answered, with some hazy intention of a joke.

"He don't have to. He and Mr. Nichols are puttin' in a week on a country job, and it's handier for them to stay there nights, so they don't come home. I miss Alfred more'n I do them. He's visitin' his cousins out to Melrose, while his pa's away. Children are always a care, boys especially, but I sh'd hate to live in a house that didn't have a young one in it. Mis' Palmer wanted" — But here she interrupted herself. "You been losin' some buttons, Mr. Carter," she suggested, a little severely. "I wish you'd leave that vest downstairs to-night, 'n' let me see if I can't find some to match 'em. No need to pay a quarter to a tailor. Mis' Palmer wanted to take Alfred back with her," the landlady resumed, without a pause, "but Mr. Nichols thought he better not lose too much schoolin'. She wants you to come up, next summer. She asked me to tell you. She said

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if you could come up when Nettie has her vacation, Nettie could drive you all round."

"I guess the old lady herself could drive me, all right."

Mrs. Miles glanced at him swiftly, but she did not otherwise betray perception of a gibe. "You'd have a good time," she said. "It's a sightly country. If there was water instead of hills it'd look a good deal like down 'round Searsport." Then she held her hands for a moment, and lifted an ear towards the window. "What's that pedlar hollerin'?" she asked. "'Fresh mackerel, ten cents a dozen'?" Well, that's cheap enough, even for tinkers—but pshaw! I ain't begun my ice yet, 'n' I couldn't eat more'n half of 'em, me alone here, before they'd spoil. Mis' Palmer's a good woman," she went on—not like one who argues, but as though continuing a statement of fact. "She's all bound up in her daughter, 'n' sometimes she lets it carry her too far; but that ain't like bein' selfish for yourself, is it? Not so bad, I mean. I own she riled me sometimes, when she'd talk about Fairbanks marryin' Miss Dow,—she kept that up, to the very last day, in spite of all my tellin' her there was other plans made; but course I knew all she was thinkin' of was gettin' Miss Dow out of Nettie's way, and I knew the

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minute either of the girls was good and settled she'd give the last rag off her back to help Miss Dow — or anybody else — 'n' so I tried to take her by-and-large, as the sayin' is, and be easy with her. She's gone now, anyhow."

"Thank God!" said Carter, with a grimace, as he went away. The landlady's monologue was tending towards personalities; perhaps, he reflected as he opened his window to fresh air and the afternoon sun, he had stopped it none too soon. But, when he had done the one thing, he stood still, bewildered by a sudden sense of strangeness, and queried what next to do. He glanced at his pipes, faithful old companions of toil and revery. Yet somehow they did not tempt him. He was in no mood to work or to muse. He felt unsettled, restless, not at home, as though all at once he had become at odds with his environment. By and by the thought that this was true might be a source of pride, inspiring faith that he had grown beyond the humble and the common; but here and now, in the beginning, it was rather painful. He welcomed the diversion of a knock at his door, and he hurried forward, with an eagerness which abated somewhat when he found that Holl was the visitor.

"Glad to see you back, Mr. Carter," Holl

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said as he put out his hand. "Mrs. Miles told me you were in, and I come right up to congratulate you."

"Eh? What? Oh, yes!" Carter stammered. He did not make way for his caller to come in, and Holl seemed to take the cold reception as a reproof. He hastened to justify himself.

"You think I ought to done it sooner?" he suggested. "Well, honest truth, I didn't hear a word about you'n' Miss Dow, didn't hear it was all fixed, I mean, till after you'd gone down East. I don't get much house gossip, you know, bein' in and out at odd times, the way I am. Mr. Jenks told me, not more'n three days ago. I ain't even had a chance to see *her*, since. All I c'n say is," — he hesitated and choked a little, but his eyes did not falter, — "I believe you've got the best girl in Boston, and I hope you'll both be happy!"

He gave Carter's irresponsive hand a desperate squeeze and hastened up the hall to his own room. Not yet recovered from his surprise and confusion, Carter shut the door and fell to staring soberly out of the window. He could not have extenuated, he could scarcely have explained, his emotions; but he had an irritating sense of constriction and impulsion, of being hemmed in and pushed onward; and, quite overlooking the

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fact that the whole situation was of his own making, he was conscious of a wish that people would stand off and permit him to arrange his own life. He almost envied Alfred's playmates, just now dismissed from school and waking the echoes of the street. In this, he thought, resides the privilege and charm of childhood, that no one expects the child to do any but unexpected things.

He looked away, as he realised the futility of such thoughts, and his eye, falling upon his table, chanced to rest on the story of renunciation that he had written months before, the tale of the poor and prospectless man who resigned to another the girl he loved. He recalled the thing now as a babble of strained sentiment; and, smiling sourly, he tore the manuscript into bits. Then he went out of the house and walked aimlessly towards and into Roxbury, through streets where business and domesticity touch elbows, through other streets where quiet homes prevail, and through still others where the bar-room on the corner points the way to poverty, disease, and dirt. He came back by Columbus avenue, rejoicing, as a business man, that purblind Gentility had passed by the beautiful street and left it to be gladly utilised by far-sighted Commerce. He turned into Washington street again by the way of West Newton, perhaps that he might look

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up tenderly at that building which seems a standing rebuke to the misogynist, so overfull is it, in school-hours, of youth and beauty and joy. And then, having duly recognised the claims of the poetical and the practical, and gained an appetite, he went up to a noisy little French restaurant where boys go to "see life," and, disregarding brassy-faced age and downy-chinned youth, made a very good dinner.

He did not forget that he must see Miss Dow before he slept. He knew he might meet her when she came from the shop; but while he dawdled over his coffee and cigar that opportunity passed. For the present, he found a certain satisfaction in the knowledge that here, spite of the chattering crowd, he was practically alone. There was no one in the room to whom he was even a name; provided he kept within the bounds of decency and the common law, he could act upon any whimsey, and be remembered only as a frolicsome stranger. And when he came out on the street his thought enlarged, and he dwelt upon the freedom that one finds in cities only. Avoiding a certain few thoroughfares, he might walk around Boston till Doomsday and hardly once in a week see a familiar face. Easy enough to keep away, if he wished, from everybody at Miles's —

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But at this point he perceived that the exceptional thing had happened — simply because he had mechanically turned towards Newspaper row. It was Scanlon who was coming towards him; and Scanlon seemed glad. He checked the headlong stride into which the young American so naturally falls, and smilingly held out his hand.

“Don’t care if I do!” he said, as though Carter had spoken. “They’re on me, too. Let’s follow the crowd to the nearest Drunkards’ Retreat, and I’ll put you next a scare-head story.

“Here’s happy days!” Scanlon rattled on, even before they found their places at the quieter end of the bar. “As the candy butcher in the dime museum says, she’s strictly pure, extra sour, and made of the clear juice of the lemon — meanin’ that she’s the best there is. You’re It, old man, and your life’ll be a dream! But say! — This one is mine, Harry; same old bottle — You didn’t know the other girl and I are fixin’ to do the same act, did you?”

“Yes?” It was the easiest thing Carter could say.

“That’s right. She’s promised to marry me next month, between the eighteenth and twenty-fifth. Goin’ to notify the Old Sugar-Maple just a day ahead — so she can get to the weddin’, if

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she hustles, but won't have any chance to make a holler. She's done me dirt so many times," Scanlon added argumentatively, "I'm justified in headin' her off, ain't I? Sure! The girl stands for it. She says when the thing's all settled she'll be the best mother-in-law ever."

"Oh, I guess there won't be any trouble," Carter answered vaguely.

"Not from her, there won't. Another thing, I'm a Catholic, but the girl was brought up a Methodist, so we can't have a church weddin' — but we've got that all arranged, too. Religion's all right, but hell! what's the odds, as long's you're happy? The girl's goin' to suit herself about the weddin' — priest, rabbi, parson, justice of the peace, cross your hands and jump over a broom — any old way, so we get hitched. I think she'd be willin' to pull off the event in Miles's parlour. Now, this is what I'm gettin' at: the two girls have been chums, you know; why can't we bunch up and do the double turn, right then and there?"

Carter hesitated, playing with his glass. He was not prepared to answer either "Yes" or "No;" but he managed to laugh, at last, and to utter evasive words in a jovial tone. "That's not a matter for a mere man to decide," he said. "Speaking for myself, Frank, I'd as soon be

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married in your company as in that of anybody I know."

Scanlon slapped him on the shoulder. "We can do it, if we stick together!" he cried. "Have another drink? No? Just as well for both of us, but I'm kind o' sorry, to-night, that I belong to the labourin' class. If I meet Fairbanks I'll give him my roll and tell him to celebrate for me all day to-morrow! I s'pose you're goin' my way?"

Ordinarily, Scanlon was not selfishly given to garrulity; but now, so absorbed was he in his own future, Carter's silence went unremarked. It was not so much that Scanlon talked, as it was that he communed with his inmost soul and expressed the result. He had a thousand dollars saved up, he said; he would get a little suite, four or five rooms, in some apartment-house at the South End, this side of Massachusetts avenue, rent about twenty-five dollars a month; then he'd be near enough so he could go home to dinner on Mondays and Tuesdays, anyway. He was sure of twelve hundred a year from the *Star*, and he generally scooped in four or five hundred on the side, election bets, good things in the pool-rooms, poker luck, and all that. He thought he would drink less whiskey, now, and smoke fewer cigars, though, of course, there'd always be a drink and a smoke for the boys, when they

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dropped around Sunday night. With what he could earn and "make" and save, he could count on an income of fifteen hundred dollars "to start with." It was evident that he cherished the belief which almost every man indulges until he has passed the age of forty, that he was destined to be rich some day; but, pending that glorious consummation, he expected to lead a life of semi-luxurious bliss, of which — this also was evident — he did not feel himself at all deserving.

It was a study for a philosopher, this new growth of hopes, desires, ambitions, fostered by love of woman in the heart of a young man who had tested life's baser pleasures and was willing to put them by. It prompted the query whether such a husband really does gain more than he gives. For a woman's purity may be wholly a matter of temperament, whereas a man's fidelity is based upon knowledge and self-control, and in a comparative valuation of virtues should fairly outweigh it. Thus Carter mentally stated the case in favour of his sex, wondering that Scanlon should overlook the facts and take a tone of deprecation. Yet the argument did not help *him* to be brave when a half-hour later, in the upper hall, he unexpectedly came upon Miss Dow. He started and

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stammered and acted like anything but a superior. But she was quietly friendly, and she gave him her hand as calmly as though the deed had been directed before the world began.

“I’m glad to see you, Mr. Carter,” she said. “I hope you had a pleasant fortnight.”

“‘Mr. Carter?’” he repeated protestingly. “Is that all?” He was not so anxious for affectionate familiarity, perhaps, as he was desirous to suggest that he had done nothing to warrant her withholding it. Yet, in spite of himself, he found himself on the defensive — all the more so when she looked at him frankly and laughed.

“Do you really want any more — Maurice?” Though still she smiled he fancied a gleam of satire in her eyes. “Why not come down to the parlour — if you’ve nothing important on hand — and tell me all about it?”

He made no answer in words, but he sulkily followed her downstairs into the chilly, dimly-lighted room. The corridor was warmer; he did not close the door. With or without an equally good reason, he neglected to turn up the gas. But Miss Dow seemed indifferent. Shivering a little, she took a knitted scarf from the sofa and wrapped it around her shoulders.

“Mrs. Miles relies too much on the heat of

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the sun, doesn't she?" she said. "We don't get all the comforts of home here — quite. I don't wonder you're going to some place where money will buy more modern conveniences."

"Who said I was going away?" Carter demanded stormily.

"I took that for granted." She had seated herself, and she answered in an even voice and looked up at him without a trace of emotion. "Why, aren't you?"

"I swear, Florence, I don't know what you mean! Haven't I just come back?"

"Have you? I thought we met by chance, just now. Since you didn't take the trouble to notify me when you were coming, and didn't make any effort to see me, how should I know but you'd been in the house for a week?"

It was all so different from what he had expected that he could only stare at her frowningly and wait for her to continue. She did not delay him long.

"I think we'd better stop being silly," she said all at once. "You imagined you liked me, — men do take such fancies about all sorts of women, don't they? — and I *did* like you, but when you found that it was merely a dangerous passing whim on your part, why — *I* began to get over it."

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"I don't"—

She held up her hand. "I know!" she affirmed. "If you had really—loved me, you wouldn't have had to run away from me when you took up your novel. The love that lasts is the kind that inspires a man's work and helps him through; not the kind that makes a man go to a woman—for amusement, when he's nothing else to do. I don't think I'd care to be a hindrance part of the time and a plaything the rest of it!"

"You couldn't be, Florence!" he cried. As she receded from him, she seemed more precious; yet he sought in vain for an argument—even an appeal—that would bring her nearer. He took a turn up and down the room, to gain time, whilst he demanded inspiration from all his gods; but when he halted it was only to fall once more into a hang-dog attitude and listen speechlessly to unflattering words:

"Besides—do you remember the Sunday afternoon we went to the Tabernacle? how we met two of your newspaper friends, on the way back? You were very loving before you saw them, but after that you seemed nervous and worried. I've been thinking about that. I've decided that I wouldn't like to marry a man who felt as though he must apologise for me—

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to anybody. I don't know why he should." And now there was a note of pain and indignation in her voice. "It isn't that I'm a — a light woman. You know I'm not. It must be because I work in a shop, or live in a lodging-house, or both. But why did you ever come here, if it's so very low? You must have been planning to study us and make use of us — in books, of course — from the very first. I think that's mean!"

"I wasn't!"

She looked at him thoughtfully, but it was evident that his angry disclaimer did not carry conviction. "I'm wondering," she said, "whether you're all selfish or just — notional. Perhaps it's your imagination that's to blame. When you hadn't much to take up your mind you got to thinking about me, — because I was near, — and in the end, out of all the dreams, you created a woman ever so much prettier and cleverer than I am. You saw the *real* woman the moment your friends saw her — and then you began to be sorry. But I don't understand it!" she added, almost vehemently. "Are all literary men like that? If they are I should think it would be just as well — more kind to women, too — to fall in love with photographs!"

"But in that event your friend Jenks would

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miss the pleasure of advertising the fact," Carter muttered savagely.

"Did he? And it made you angry? Then that proves you weren't in earnest. But I never said anything to Mr. Jenks about — us. If anybody did, it must have been yourself. All I shall say *now*, even if Nettie asked me, would be that we'd fortunately outgrown a foolish fancy — both of us." Then she appeared to read a meaning into a furious gesture of which Carter was hardly aware. "Did you expect me to cry about it?" she queried. "Well, I'm not heartless — I have cried. Not for myself, you know — I haven't done anything to be ashamed of; but I shed some tears over the grave of the man I thought you were. Now I'm all done. I've realised that we shall live our lives apart. Perhaps we'll be none the worse for having met. I don't believe it's in your nature to love any woman long, but I hope you'll meet one who will make you happy."

She rose as though to signify the end. But now Carter had found his tongue. "Don't you think I've been pretty patient?" he demanded in a tone of repression.

"Patient? How?"

"To stand here and let you insult me. Would I have borne that if I were indifferent to you?"

"You might have," she said promptly. "You

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might be conscious that I'd told the truth, that you deserved to hear it all, and that there was no reply you could decently make."

"There you go again!" He lifted his eyes and his hands, imploring Heaven to judge. "I won't talk to you now, Florence. I'm too angry. I might be unjust and unkind, as you have been. I shall try to think it all over, as calmly as I can. If I find I've given you any excuse for these—these monstrous accusations of yours, I'll own it and make amends. I suppose you'll be generous enough, at least, to let me talk to you again to-morrow?"

She looked at him long and intently. "Yes," she answered at last, "you may meet me again—if you decide that you want to. Good-by"—and she smiled, ever so faintly—"till then."

XVIII

THAT movable festival, bedtime, was still in the distance, and how to bridge the intervening hours became a serious question. His brain seething with discordant thoughts, Carter hurried upstairs for his coat and hat and let himself out of the house. Jenks or Miss Palmer would be, he felt, an infliction that in his present frame of mind he could not endure. Better to sit on the curbstone and be pelted with the offal of the language by every hoodlum at the South End!

Doubtless his aspect was calmer than his mood; but he fancied that the inward stress and tumult disordered his appearance and he glanced with some misgiving at the first passing policeman. It quieted his nerves to be viewed and dismissed with unconcern. He went into the next two bar-rooms — bar-rooms were neighbourly here — and ordered whiskey in each; and after the second drink he lighted a cigar and owned himself soothed and uplifted. Now he wanted to be amused. He started down Washington street. Of set purpose, all his senses were held open to impressions from without, yet ever and again an uninvited thought intruded. He noted how the shop-girls were tentatively

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putting off their winter garments, and it occurred to him that he had never seen Miss Dow in a shirt-waist. He encountered a sandwich-man, stiffly disconsolate between his painted boards, and then he remembered Holl's prevision of unending poverty, and wondered how the world looks to a man who knows that he can never hope to earn more than ten dollars a week. He suffered a pang of sympathy — mainly alcoholic — for the poor devils, the majority of mankind, whom circumstances condemn to squalid homes and mean pleasures. But speedily, just as he had dismissed the girl, so, too, he set aside Holl and his kind. After all, it was because the poor were providentially numerous that whiskey and women were cheap.

He would not consciously yield to pity, or any enervating emotion; but certain shop-windows, catching his eye, suggested that it would be amusing to come down here to the South End, once in a while, and throw away a few dollars. There was a little "second-hand store" that displayed a sign, "Skates, fifteen cents;" skates were skates to the guttersnipes that never acquired fifteen cents; and a man might feel like a millionaire, and figure as one, standing in the door of the shop, some winter evening, and handing out the things. Again, it would be an

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interesting experiment to give a dollar to the negro bootblack who hopelessly invited custom there at the head of the blind alley. Moreover, it would be great sport to drop a few quarters along the sidewalk, between the ladder-house and the livery stable, and watch to see who picked them up. These all would be so many ways of demonstrating — not kinship in feeling, but — superiority; for he would not be a resident of the South End, then: he would dawn on it from delightful distance, like a comet — or a drunken Klondiker.

Somehow reminded of a present need, he took another drink. Then, as he once more pushed through the ruck of loafers that encumbered the sidewalk, he found himself in front of a certain "variety" theatre. That was the place to spend an hour. But whereas he had walked in boldly, when he went in the character of student, now he passed by, to the corner beyond, and then, returning, swerved suddenly within and out of sight. Willing though he might be to find diversion in vulgarity, he was not quite ready to be caught in the act; and even after he had squeezed into his narrow seat, in the middle of an odorous row, he eyed his fellows with the suspicious sidelong glance that tells of a bad conscience. The half-grown boys and half-baked

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men around him had enjoyed and applauded a "terpsichorean divertisement" and a "disrobing sensation," before he fairly fixed his attention on the "Great Double Specialty Company" — so called because composed of whites and mulattoes. Then he fell to admiring the mixed bloods. The comparison was all in their favour. They were neither bloated nor padded. They had voices and knew how to use them. They were better actors than the white girls, too; less awkward, more intelligent. Looking forward to the day when the genius of the negro for comedy and opera will have a chance to find expression, Carter became, for the moment, almost an altruist.

Such large considerations presently gave way to reflections provoked by the time and the place. While the women on the stage enjoyably assisted men whose jests and antics degraded womanhood, they unwittingly confirmed the judgment Carter wished to decree upon their sex. Vain, frivolous, wanton, mercenary, inconstant, — such were the mildest terms one could apply to these creatures; and Carter assumed that it was rather opportunity than inclination that differentiated them from their sisters in private life. He felt a comforting conviction that most of the audience shared this view.

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Especially a bull-necked, bottle-nosed neighbour, who frequently commented, "By God, that's right!" yielded him strength and solace. Evidently these people of the lower orders, before whom humanity exhibited undisguised, cherished no illusions. Clearly the lesson learned in humble life was essentially the same that Berkeley, the superior, had tried to teach. Marry, not on sentiment, since sentiment is a fleeting, foolish thing; nor to gratify passion, since that end is easily attained without incurring responsibility; but to gain the substantial advantage which a wife may confer because she is a wife — not because she is a woman.

These of course were general truths, somewhat inspirational as to origin, having no urgent bearing upon his own career. To this effect, at least, Carter might have persuaded himself. A fancy floated in his brain, that he would take up his own problem and solve it in a massive, original, beneficent fashion — presently. Just now he was too comfortable to meddle with problems: he preferred to tower above the rest of mankind. With the generous help of whiskey he overtopped the crowd, until he tumbled into bed. Then with ammonia cocktails and the other kind he energetically dispelled, next morning, the morbid notions that assail a man on

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the day after; and when he came in from Exmouth, went straight to Miles's, and set about packing his trunk, it almost seemed to him — so persistently had he closed the eyes of his mind — that this was an enterprise he had undertaken on behalf of another man, or perhaps in the broader interest of the human race,

The trunk-packing took time; in the course of six months even an iconoclast gathers things that he will hesitate to throw away. And while Carter mulled over the trifles, he was obliged to think more or less about his purpose. He had told Miss Dow that he intended seriously to consider their relations; obviously he could best do so when uninfluenced by propinquity. He got no farther than this, this and the bald proposition that he would go to a hotel for the night; at that point he always managed to check himself and divert his mind to safe, ambiguous reflections upon the unreasonableness of woman and the duty a clever man owes to society. Thus on the whole his meditative toil became a heartening process. He was even whistling over it, in an inconsecutive, cheerful way, when, following a sharp rap at the door, Jenks walked in. Then the whistling ceased. Carter, kneeling before the trunk, looked up,

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defiant though embarrassed. But Jenks only smiled widely and sat, uninvited, down.

"Preparing for the wedding journey?" he said. "Delightful! Let me watch you awhile, and renew my youth. A member of my esteemed employer's family is being buried this afternoon; the office is closed. I took it for granted you'd be at home, and I couldn't think of a pleasanter way to spend my little holiday than to smoke a pipe and talk to you."

"Go ahead!" Carter tried to make the tone carelessly cordial. "Tobacco's on tap, on the table there." He took a chair and pretended idly to assort a heap of manuscript and clippings; but his ear, if not his eye, was painfully attentive.

Jenks opened his own pouch and elaborately, silently, filled his pipe. He did not look malevolent, Carter thought. Indeed, when the pipe was alight he clasped his hands at the back of his head and tipped his chair against the wall — for him, an unusually free-and-easy attitude. And his voice, when at length he spoke, was indicative of nothing but genial deliberation.

"Matrimony is really a very serious thing," he said; it seemed to Carter that he glanced at the trunk. "It's the vocation of some men, and some women are born to be mothers; but

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the Scriptures tell us that the angels in heaven have ceased to experiment, and I take it that's a pretty safe precedent for ordinary mortals. I notice, for my own part, that I'm fondest of humanity in the off-hours when I don't have to associate with it. Think of facing the prospect of fifty years with a sloven or a gad-about or a chatterer—or anybody! It doesn't stop at that, either. Smart young men have told me, before now, that they married a girl, not a girl's family, but as a matter of fact they do marry the family, not only the dead and damned, but the nauseous survivors. And if the girl's mother turns out to be a busybody, or her brother a yap, or her sister a trollop, the 'family' play a more spectacular part in that man's life than his wife does.

"That's why, on general principles, I approved the idea of marrying an orphan." Carter took it to be a friendly nod that accompanied this, but he did not find it expedient to scrutinise it severely. "Even a loving mother might in time become a burden. For instance, if our friend Scanlon marries Miss Palmer old lady Palmer will own it her duty to cherish her daughter's property, and she'll overwhelm him with those sticky attentions that make a man feel like a fly in a sugar-bowl. What's the proper line of conduct to pursue under these circumstances? Eh?

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Give it up? So will Scanlon. And if a man dodges or solves all such family complications there's his own family to think of. He must have children — else the other fellows will make invidious remarks. But what is he to do with them? carry them continually in his heart and worry about them, from the first whooping-cough to the final coffin? or turn them loose with these poor little worse than homeless brats that howl around the street-corners after dark? It's a large question, when you look at every side of it — sordid considerations of expense, and all. I'd like to be within hearing distance sometime when your friend Berkeley's giant intellect gets to playing around it."

He paused invitingly — but Carter did not speak.

"And even before matrimony, trouble may begin," continued Jenks, wagging his head soberly. "I had a scheme, you know: I planned to marry Miss Dow to Holl. He admires her; she likes him: large families have been reared on a slenderer foundation. Holl is smart and bright and popular, and if he had somebody to curb his tendency to riotous giving — remind him that a married man's motto must be, 'The public be damned!' — he'd soon be well fixed. I meant, you understand, to take my

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hard-earned savings and set him up in a little restaurant or something like; then his wife would see that he maintained a proper ratio between his Socialism and his business, and they'd both be happy and useful. It was a rooted idea of mine — and it hurt me to pull it up. When you told me you were going to marry Miss Dow. I was near asking you to be so kind as to die, after a year or two, and give Holl and me a chance."

"I guess we shall all die soon enough," Carter muttered uneasily.

"I doubt it." In contrast to the cold-blooded sentiment, Jenks's tone was supremely cheerful. "The undertaking business is more deserving of a boom than any industry I know. God is too good to us — He permits us all to be more or less insane: if we saw life, all the time, as it really is, suicide would be the popular diversion it ought to be. I've been assuming you'd take the common-sense view — that the mass of mankind is fit for nothing but fertiliser. I trust you didn't make your South End novel an apology for people who fail to cultivate the Christian virtues on a dollar and a half a day?"

The bearing of this was doubtful. Carter looked up and looked down again, and only gurgled indefinitely in his throat. From the

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silence, or something else, Jenks seemed to argue an affirmative.

"But that was because you weren't acquainted with the South End," Jenks lamented. "For example: Do you know which of these restaurants out here is the crooks' rendezvous? Can you tell me where the negroes went when they were turned out of Buckingham street? Did you ever hear of 'the New York streets'? By what race, chiefly, are they inhabited? Don't know? These are all commonplaces to the young fellows who are chewing tobacco this afternoon in the gallery of the Mammoth Dime. Perhaps it's because the young fellows *are* wise that they don't write novels."

Carter threw another parcel into the trunk — with somewhat superfluous vigour, it may be — and pointedly turned from his guest.

"And yet," — there was an odd new note in Jenks's voice, — "I can conceive that a novelist *might* study the hearts and the lives of these same South-Enders, and then display them to the shame of more fortunate folk. He could tell of the faithful toil, the unremitting self-denial, by which so many families are held together in homes that are really homes, though they stand midway the pawnshop and the poorhouse. Over against our riotous drunkenness, heaven-pierc-

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ing profanity, and frequent fist-fights, he would set the fact that we look to the upper circles for mean and cowardly crimes, such as murder by poisoning, and to the country towns for brutal crimes like rape. He might slap the faces of the smug parsons who perpetually whine, 'How shall we reach the masses?' by reminding them that with the masses alone abides deep and genuine Faith — else storehouses and palaces would be gutted before to-morrow's sun. He would show how the poor help the poorer, how men maintain their honesty and women their chastity though pressed by bitter temptation; how the worst tenement in the meanest street may shelter people who are thoughtful and generous and kind. Such a novelist might not teach the world to believe in God, but he'd make it possible for the most determined pessimist to believe in man."

Still Carter said no word. Then Jenks knocked the ashes out of his pipe and got to his feet. Once or twice he stamped across the room, but slowly, his chin on his breast, as though he considered his next utterance. Finally he lifted his head, and Carter caught a bleak and cheerless smile.

"I used to wonder, at first, whether you would do anything like that," Jenks declared. "You were curious about the life down here, naturally enough, and that pleased me; because, you see,

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I foolishly fancied that curiosity and intelligent sympathy were somehow akin. Now you've had the experience you wanted; you've lived in a lodging-house, made love to a shop-girl, and gone in and out amongst the proletarian vulgar. What's the result? The book will tell — but I don't need to wait for it. We're no better for you, and you're the worse for us. Even while you hugged the notion of your superiority you've been learning and practising our vices. Occasionally, for an instant, you've forgotten that you were born a countryman and have started to enter into the interests of the mass; but just so surely as anybody or anything has suggested that we were of a lower order, back you've gone to your suspicious, self-satisfied hole. The taint of Puritanism in your blood hasn't sufficed to preserve you sinless, but it has prevented you from becoming human."

He stopped for a moment, but it was only that he might go on with keener emphasis. "'Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel,'" he quoted; the tone was burdened with bitterness. "Did you ever hear that text? It means a man who flirts with every emotion until he has become incapable of a genuine passion: it means you. God hates a wabblor — and so do I. To hell with you!"

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The door closed. Carter achieved a sneer, then a contemptuous chuckle that somehow grated his throat. He had an instantaneous, consoling recollection of certain passages of his novel in which Jenks figured, and the first definite thought he grasped was a conclusion that, when the proofs came, he would elaborate them a little. And it would do no harm to modify the impressions he had registered of — some other characters. He suspected that his heroine was overdrawn. Doubtless the young Socialist, too, was an absurdly romantic figure. He would squander no complimentary epithet on either of the three. Let them pose in all their nakedness, true types of the crude and narrow natures that one must expect to encounter at the South End !

He found himself, after a while, standing and staring into his trunk, defensively repeating disconnected thoughts like these. It came to him, then, that it would be safer to act than to think or to dream — he was not anxious to memorise all the events of the day — and he crammed the last parcels into the trunk, and locked it, and hurried downstairs. He would see Mrs. Miles — some other time — or write and tell her where to send it — or if he came back — But then he knew, and at last he owned to himself, that he would never come back.

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Nor did he dwell upon this thought. He breathed more freely, in the street, but he gazed all around him in the manner of one who desperately wills that his eyes shall divert his mind. He saw a man stagger out of the bar-room opposite, and he perceived that the man was Fairbanks; but he would not spare a laugh or a curse to him, for Fairbanks, even, recalled the past. He waited to avoid him, nevertheless, delaying to cross the street until the fellow was a block or two away. Then, from the other side, moved by some imperative impulse, Carter suddenly looked back at Miles's.

The afternoon sun was on the dingy, many-windowed front. Soon the house would be in darkness. He would not be there. Possibly he ought never to have gone there. But yes! He thought of the novel that had grown from the experience; he could not foresee that the novel would prove a failure, and he reckoned it a gain that he owed to Miles's. Was there any other, actual or possible? He told himself insistently, No. Yet as he set his face towards the heart of the busy town, memory, or conscience, whispered that now he was consenting to losses that outweighed all gains, that he was leaving behind him something the years could not restore.

THE END.











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